THE POLITICS OF SUBSYSTEMS: AGENDA MANAGEMENT AND POLICY CHANGE IN EDUCATION

by

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Abstract
Why is the policy status quo more resilient in some contexts than others? What are the conditions by which policy instruments can be transformed, in lieu of other degrees of change? I argue that the properties of policy design institutions have played an important role in determining the degree of policy change during recent reforms of public education in Germany and France, following from ‘PISA shocks’ in each country. The OECD’s Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a cross-national comparison of education systems that revealed unexpectedly poor results for Germany in 2001 and France in 2007. The subsequent (and surprising) policy change outcomes can be explained by examining sector-specific policy design institutions (i.e., policy subsystems). It is from analysis of subsystem politics in the education sector that I begin to develop an agenda-management model of policy change. More specifically, I found that the existence in Germany of a stable, consensus-oriented institution for education policy design – what I call a policy oligopoly – was critical for managing the reform agenda and for facilitating a transformation of policy instruments in lieu of greater or lesser forms of change. Furthermore, the existence in France of a conflict-ridden subsystem – an unstable monopoly for policy design – resulted in a disorderly reform episode and eventually the obstruction of many of the proposed policy changes. The research involved a comparative process tracing of educational policy-making in Germany and France, involving 58 participant and expert interviews and an intensive analysis of primary documents and secondary materials. From this evidence, I describe different types of policy change involved in each case, explain the connection between subsystem politics and forms of policy change, and evaluate the plausibility of this agenda-management model when compared to more conventional explanations, such as policy internationalization or partisan-politics. The dissertation makes a number of contributions to the literature on change in public policy. It provides a novel account for how and why certain policy-making regimes facing acute external pressure
can significantly change the instrumental logic of policy yet retain aspects of the political and policy status quo, while other regimes fail in this regard.
Lay Summary

The status quo for compulsory education is often taken-for-granted by the public and politicians. Recently, however, international comparative assessments of education have demonstrated failures in the educational status quo and catalyzed reform episodes for France and Germany. The policy responses were not dramatic, despite the evidence of problems. I argue that in these cases, forms of educational policy change were the product of problem-solving for reasons of politics rather than policy. Policy change was largely determined by the institutionalized relationships between elected government, state bureaucracy, and teachers’ associations, and the compromises they could achieve regarding policy design. Policy-making institutions deliberately restrict wider participation, yet having fewer actors in the process did not lead to significant yet stable reforms in France. Somewhat surprisingly, Germany was capable of greater and more stable change (although not change that upended the status quo) because their policy design institutions incorporated a broader range of perspectives.
Preface
This dissertation is original, and the intellectual product of the author, Conrad King. The fieldwork reported herein was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H13-00949.
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List of Abbreviations

International
DG (EAC)  Directorate-General, Education and Culture
EU  European Union
IEA  International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
OECD  Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA  Program for International Student Assessment
TIMSS  Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

Germany
BDA  Confederation of German Employers Associations [Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände]
BLK  Bund-Länder Commission for Education Planning and Research Funding [Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung]
BLLV  Bavarian Teachers’ Association [Bayerischer Lehrer- und Lehrerinnenverband]
BMBF  Federal Ministry of Education and Research [Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung]
CDU  Christian Democratic Party
CSU  Christian Social Party
DBB  German Civil Service Foundation [Deutscher Beamtenbund und Tarifunion]
DGB  Confederation of German Trade Unions [Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund]
DIPF  German Institute for International Education Research [Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung]
DL  German Teachers’ Association [Deutscher Lehrerverband]
DPhV  German Philological Association [Deutscher Philologenverband]
FDP  Free Democratic Party
GEW  Education and Science Union [Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft]
IQB  Institute for Quality Development in Education [Institut zur Qualitätsentwicklung im Bildungswesen]
KMK  Conference of German Länder Ministers of Education and Culture [Kultusministerkonferenz]
MPIB  Max Planck Institute for Education Research [Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung]
NRW  North Rhine-Westphalia
SPD  Social Democratic Party
VBE  Association for Education [Verband Bildung und Erziehung]

France
CFDT  French Democratic Confederation of Labour [Confédération Francaise Démocratique du Travail]
CGT  General Confederation of Labour [Confédération générale du travail]
CNRS  National Centre for Scientific Research [Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique]
CSE  Superior Council for Education [Conseil Supérieur de l’Éducation]
CSEP  Syndicated Confederation of National Education [Confédération Syndicale de l’Éducation Nationale]
CSP  Superior Council for Programs [Conseil Supérieur des Programmes]
DEP  Department for Evaluation and Forecasting [Direction de l’Évaluation et de la Prospective]
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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>DEPP</td>
<td>Department of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance [Direction de l’Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Performance]</td>
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<tr>
<td>DESCO</td>
<td>Department of School Education [Direction de l’Enseignement Scolaire]</td>
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<tr>
<td>DGESCO</td>
<td>Department (General) of School Education [Direction Générale de l’Enseignement Scolaire]</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPLE</td>
<td>local public educational institutions (lycées) [Établissement Public Local d’Enseignement]</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCPE</td>
<td>Federation of Councils for Students’ Parents [Fédération des Conseils de Parents d’Élèves]</td>
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<td>FEN</td>
<td>Federation for National Education [Fédération de l’Éducation Nationale]</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIDL</td>
<td>Independent and Democratic Federation of Secondary Students [Fédération Indépendante et Démocratique Lycéenne]</td>
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<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>Open Force [Force Ouvrière]</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSU</td>
<td>Federation of United Unions [Fédération Syndicale Unitaire]</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCE</td>
<td>High Council for Education [Haut Conseil de l’Éducation]</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCEEE</td>
<td>High Council for School Evaluation [Haut Conseil de l’Évaluation de l’École]</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFE</td>
<td>French Institute of Education [Institut Français de l’Éducation]</td>
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<tr>
<td>IGEN</td>
<td>General Inspectorate [Inspection Générale de l’Éducation Nationale]</td>
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<tr>
<td>INRP</td>
<td>National Institute for Education Research [Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IREDU</td>
<td>Institute for Research in the Sociology and Economics of Education [L’Institut de Recherche sur l’Éducation : Sociologie et Economie de l’Education]</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOLF</td>
<td>Organic Law relative to Financial Regulation [loi Organique relative aux Lois de Finances]</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEN</td>
<td>National Ministry of Education [Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale]</td>
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<tr>
<td>PEEP</td>
<td>Federation of Parents of Children in Public School [fédération des Parents d’Élèves de l’Enseignement Public]</td>
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<tr>
<td>SGEN</td>
<td>General Union for National Education [Syndicat Général de l’Éducation Nationale]</td>
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<tr>
<td>SE-UNSA</td>
<td>Teachers’ Union – National Autonomous Trade Union [Syndicat des Enseignants – Union Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes]</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNES</td>
<td>National Union of Secondary Schoolteachers [Syndicat National des Enseignements de Second degré]</td>
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<tr>
<td>SGEN</td>
<td>General Union for National Education [Syndicat Général de l’Éducation Nationale]</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNALC</td>
<td>National Union for Upper and Lower Secondary Schooling [Syndicat National des Lycées et Collèges]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNL</td>
<td>National Union of Secondary Students [Union Nationale Lycéenne]</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZEP</td>
<td>Zones of Educational Priority [Zones d’Éducation Prioritaire]</td>
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Above all, to my never-flagging mother: thank-you.
Dedication

For John and Zena.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Argument and Research Questions

What makes the status quo so powerful when creating policy? Under normal political conditions, the risks and costs associated with policy change create incentives for powerful actors to adhere to existing policy frameworks. The reasons for the power of the status quo seem abundantly clear: cultural norms, delicate balances of power, cognitive uncertainty, and the structuring effects of historical practices produce a knowable and bankable equilibrium in many policy areas. Most policy remains consistent with an existing policy framework and is adaptive to a stable external environment. Yet there are episodes when the risks, costs or problems associated with preserving the status quo exceed those of reform. Compulsory public education is a case in point: education policy is under pressure from new technologies, the involvement of international organizations, and increased demands by societal stakeholders. Elected politicians have become more involved in compulsory education, as they frame it as a panacea for the many challenges facing their societies, from social disintegration to economic stagnation. Education policy reform has been justified in the context of changing public opinion, ‘permanent austerity’, international competitiveness, current best practice established at the European or international level, ‘evidence-based policy-making’, and comparative international assessments.

Amongst the latter, the most influential has been the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), a large-scale international assessment comparing the skills acquisition of 15 and 16-year-old students, conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). PISA conveyed unexpectedly poor national rankings for Germany and France, yet sparked very different politics for education reform, and unexpected policy change outcomes. Historically, both systems of compulsory education exemplified the resilience of a powerful status quo, due to venerable national traditions, well-entrenched educational bureaucracies, and influential vested interests. Of the two,
Germany was more change-resistant at the national level because compulsory education is a sub-national jurisdiction. There is not one education system, but sixteen. For meaningful national policy change they must coordinate reform together, seeming to destine (or doom) Germany to lowest common denominator outcomes – if not outright policy stagnation, then at most, incremental adjustments that reinforce the status quo. Yet recent national education policies in Germany and France displayed puzzling outcomes. Despite a large number of veto players and relatively weak educational bureaucracies, Germany significantly changed its evaluative policy instruments between 2001 and 2005, coinciding with a very public ‘PISA shock’. In France, the reform opportunity came later, following poor PISA results revealed in 2007. Yet in spite of France’s early involvement in international assessments, power concentrated in the central executive, government elected on a reform mandate, and evidence of policy failure, the French government was unsuccessful in transforming education policy. The political will for reform existed in both countries, yet the status quo had greater resilience in France than in Germany, which was surprising given the antecedent conditions.

How does one account for reform in the logic of national-level policy instruments in Germany, yet the resiliency of the status quo in France? Why did Germany, despite low reform capacity and significant distance from international policy models, manage to affect significant educational policy change, while France, with centralized and concentrated decision-making processes and closer proximity to international models, could not? In short, what are the conditions for significant reform of instrumental logics in policy areas well-insulated by the state yet facing pressures from globalization, such as compulsory public education?
1.2 Educational Policy Change: Surveying the Field

Despite the rich literature in other disciplines, the study of education has been somewhat of a blind spot for political scientists until recently (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011; Jakobi, Martens, and Wolf 2010). This is surprising considering how important compulsory education has been for the modern nation-state; it has served political functions like creating citizens or fostering societal integration, as well as economic functions like training workers or facilitating economic growth (Gellner 1983). Furthermore, education is an ‘old’ policy area: if Bismarck’s insurance schemes indicate the birth of modern public policy, then public education (in some form) preceded this by several decades in both Germany and France (Iversen and Stephens 2008, 602). Despite its functional importance and old pedigree, education policy has often been neglected by political scientists because it was considered special, different from social policy, and typically excluded from analyses of the welfare state (Wilensky 1975, 3). What is lacking is a thorough application of political science theories to the determinants of education policy change (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011). Where political science has examined these determinants, I review the literatures below, dividing the approaches into three categories: internationalist; pluralist; and statist. Political science has begun to rediscover education as a policy area, yet it remains an area with much potential for generating further insights.

1 Amongst non-political scientists, education policy has typically been treated as an exogenous, independent variable, with sociologists, economists and educational scientists responsible for the bulk of the research on education. Their contributions tended to focus on the effect that policy had on other outcomes, such as social stratification (Dronkers 2010), human capital formation (Goldin and Katz 2008), or educational governance (Clark 1983). “[Political science] can complement [these] efforts by analyzing how differences in political institutions and processes have contributed to creating and maintaining some distinctive policy emphases” (Heidenheimer 1997, 6).

2 Each approach emphasizes a particular independent variable and argues for the importance of a particular set of actors. Many approaches acknowledge that multiple variables are often necessary, in line with early multivariate analyses of educational expenditure which indicate that it “is an arena in which moncausal explanations are wholly inappropriate” (Castles 1989, 431; see also Castles 1982; Verner 1979). For more complex policy outcomes, perhaps even multiple theories are needed to explain the process. “This is one of the more problematic issues for scholars working in the public policy field: it is not easy to convincingly explain the ongoing process of public policy (with all its various steps) using the same theoretical framework for all the different components of the process itself” (Capano 2009, 14).
1.2.1 Determinants of Education Policy Change: Internationalist Explanations and Ideas

International political economists have made a causal connection between the behaviour of transnational or international actors and education policy change at the national level. This is not an entirely new approach, as sociologists and educational specialists have been examining this phenomenon since at least the 1970s. Education internationalization is thus a well-developed research agenda, one which overlaps with broader political science literature on policy diffusion, convergence, transfer or translation (Stone 2012). However, the early 2000s sparked fresh interest in the internationalization of education policy, because international and supranational organizations became increasingly involved in processes of internationalization and Europeanization via comparative assessments like PISA, or agenda-setting exercises like the Lisbon Strategy (2000), the Bologna Process (1999) or the Copenhagen Process (2002).

There was something distinctive about PISA, in particular. For one, it had obvious policy effects: a number of countries seemed to respond directly to PISA rankings in the development of education

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3 One theoretical framework was developed by sociologists John Meyer and Brian Rowan (1977), who argued that education systems are rule-conforming institutions which adapt to shared (global) norms rather than the functional demands of their own polity or economy. This ‘world institutionalism’ sustained a major research agenda within the sociology of education, and was partly taken up by organizational sociologists for more general explanations of how institutions emulate one another transnationally (see Dimaggio and Powell 1983). However, world institutionalism in education was critiqued on normative grounds as an implicitly neo-liberal modernization theory, on theoretical grounds for failing to account for the actual mechanisms of policy diffusion, and empirically for ignoring the ways in which national education systems remained quite distinct (see Boli, Ramirez, and J.W. Meyer 1985; Dale and Robertson 2002, 2007; Dale 1989, 2000, 2005; H.-D. Meyer and Rowan 2006; J. W. Meyer, Boli, and Thomas 1987; J. W. Meyer et al. 1997; Robertson, Bonal, and Dale 2002; Robertson 2005).

4 Comparative educationists have developed a research niche known as ‘educational transfer’, with the bulk of analysis devoted to the sending side of transfers (Waldow 2012, 411. See also Halpin and Troyna 1995; Perry and Tor 2008; Phillips and Ochs 2004; Steiner-Khamsi 2012). For the less-studied ‘receiving’ side; the consensus among comparative educationists is that effects vary enormously across countries. They argue that much of the educational terminology is discursively constructed (or reconstructed) in a domestic context, so it is unlikely that there will ever be complete emulation of a foreign education system, or full convergence on an international policy model. Local governing bodies actively respond to global discourses and local contexts (respectively referred to as ‘refraction’ and ‘reflection’), and global agendas become manifest in national policy decisions only when they resonate with local constituencies (Perry and Tor 2008, 523). This suggests that the internationalization of education is indeed occurring, but perhaps not at the level of whole systems of education.
policy, and many national policy discourses identified PISA as a catalyst for change. Moreover, the argument that PISA was causing domestic policy change seemed compelling when one considered some of its unique features. First, unlike its predecessors, PISA was policy-oriented. It produced more than just data for consumption by education researchers and specialists; it modelled high-performance education systems for the explicit purpose of lesson-drawing by policy-makers (Figazzolo 2009; OECD 2007; Rose 1991). Second, national governments had solicited this advice. Even prior to PISA, government bureaus approached international organizations such as the OECD’s Directorate of Education, in order to learn more about educational performance from a comparative perspective.5 Finally, PISA was a new technology in a number of different respects, and therefore made an impression on national policy-makers regarding the limits to their own knowledge. PISA was a novel epistemological technology and measurement tool because it used psychometrics and large sample sizes to generate new types of data about educational performance, promoting a kind of ‘governing by numbers’ (Grek 2009). It also adopted a new political technology – international rankings – which condensed large amounts of data into oversimplified yet easily accessible information, putting political pressure on actors involved in national policy-making. These features suggested that high-level national decision-makers were responding to PISA, with policy change caused by social

5 The OECD has long been an ‘ideational arbiter’: “the organization, historically, has not only been a provider of raw empirical data, it has also sought to reflect and shape the parameters of policy debates as they emerge across its members” (Harmsen and Braband 2015, 32). For compulsory education, the OECD began to develop educational indicators in the mid-1980s, driven by political interests in the USA and France. American federal bureaucrats were concerned with losing the Cold War because they were not sufficiently developing the technology skills of young people, given obstacles thrown up by a decentralized education system (the Fed wanted the OECD to help them “get a grip on the individual school systems”(Troehler 2011, 152)). France’s (leftist) government worried about the lack of educational opportunities for socio-economically disadvantaged children. Both countries wanted comparable education data, and their national experts worked closely with the OECD Secretariat to develop indicators and assessment tools. By the 1990s, other countries were soliciting the OECD for data, and the Secretariat responded with their 'Education at a glance' series, providing (mainly qualitative) overviews of various national systems of education. A veritable transnational epistemic community had begun to develop (Knodel, Windzio, and Martens 2014, 3; Leuze, Martens, and Rusconi 2007).
learning.\textsuperscript{6} What was not clear was who exactly was doing the learning, nor was it clear the degree to which they were learning from past (national) experience or novel (international) information. Nonetheless, a theory began to develop around the ‘internationalization of education policy’, which suggested that learning from international ideas like PISA was a key mechanism for national policy change.

Given assumptions about learning, political scientists advanced this theory by arguing that a global convergence of education policy was driven by international policy models and the agency of transnational organizations (Breakspear 2012; Dobbins and Martens 2012; Jakobi 2009; Martens et al. 2010; Martens, Knodel, and Windzio 2014; Martens, Rusconi, and Leuze 2007; Niemann 2009, 2010, 2014). Rather than assume that norms or cognitive theories diffuse globally via osmosis or isomorphism, these scholars looked for the mechanisms by which ideas are transmitted, and found them in the governance instruments used by transnational actors like the OECD. Thus, the primary explanatory variable for the internationalization of education policy is international ideas, and the causal mechanisms are the tools of communication or governance used by international organizations to convey these ideas. This ‘transmission’ of information is constrained by national ‘reception’ factors, with intervening variables being the national principles or values surrounding education, and veto players in domestic political institutions (such as the government executive, legislatures or judiciary). This theory is primarily interested in explaining international convergence, yet in so doing, it asserted a set of causal variables and mechanisms for policy change occurring at the domestic level. However, limited case studies show that even when domestic political actors directly reference PISA, there have been a whole range of policy reactions from comprehensive reform to seeming willful ignorance (Bieber and Martens

\footnote{Peter Hall (1993, 278) defines social learning as “the deliberate attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in response to past experience and new information. Learning is indicated when policy changes as the result of such a process.” The difficulty with this definition is that it assumes learning from the outcome – just because policy has changed, it does not mean that learning occurred. Policy goals or techniques could be changed for other reasons, with policy-makers citing experience or new information being little more than ‘cheap talk’.}
Furthermore, national policies have changed in unexpected ways.\textsuperscript{7} In terms of empirics, there is a demonstrable need for comparative and longitudinal analyses of outlier cases, in order to tease out the mechanisms that allow a domestic policy status quo to be resilient or undermined. In other words, if domestic factors merely filter the internationalization of education, why is policy change so disparate across cases – and in unexpected directions?

Analytical choices are part of the reason that the ‘internationalization of education policy’ model has failed to explain the degree of policy change in certain national contexts. Their analysis operates at the macro level – examining global trends – and they have been primarily concerned with explaining international convergence rather than national policy processes. In generating a theory that could ostensibly incorporate many highly diverse cases, their dependent variable looks for changes that are discontinuous and teleological (i.e., measuring change vis-à-vis proximity to an international model), when other change dynamics could be occurring in specific cases, such as utilitarian, cyclical, or dialectical policy change (see Howlett and Cashore 2009). Furthermore, the treatment of national actors, institutions and ideas as intervening instead of independent variables under-specifies domestic causal mechanisms. This literature does not analyze exactly how domestic actors engage in learning about educational issues, which actors do the learning, nor how this relates to the strategic use of international ideas to formulate policies that are possible within a given national context (see May 1992; Quirk 1988; Toens 2010). Theories of education policy internationalization are important for drawing

\textsuperscript{7} France and Germany are amongst these ‘outliers’. Martens et al. (2010) suggest that despite the risks and costs associated with reform, veto players in Germany were convinced not to exercise their veto. However, it is only clear what each veto player did (or did not do), it is not clear why they did it. In France, the power of international ideas and transnational governance appeared insufficient for radical policy change, despite more favourable ideational and institutional conditions. Dobbins and Martens (2012) argue that although veto opportunities in France were fewer, France did not reform in response to poor PISA results because of uneven manifestation of ‘local problem pressure’ (the exact meaning of this is not clear) and widespread aversion to international (neo-liberal) ideas.
attention to international discourses and transnational actors, yet in some cases, the influence of international actors on domestic policy-making might indeed be contextual rather than causal.  

1.2.2 Determinants of Educational Policy Change: Pluralist Explanations and Partisanship

Domestic agency is a presupposition of a strand of literature located partway between comparative politics and historical macro-sociology, which has tried to establish if political parties matter for educational policy change. Early work in this tradition (Castles 1982; Verner 1979) revolved around the question: Do explanations of educational development and change even need political variables, or are socio-economic forces sufficient? Subsequent empirical analyses have suggested that parties do indeed matter for spending and school structure (Castles 1989, 1998), although we lack information about partisan influence on other policy outputs. Because reform is in part due to government attention to educational issues, the question remains whether political parties (in government) are a determinant for every aspect of education policy, and if so how.

If partisanship matters for educational policy change, then two models can explain how parties form preferences and translate them into policy: power-resource theory; and partisan theory (also

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8 We know that transnational actors influence domestic policy development by constructing and diffusing norms and epistemes, the ‘constitutive ideas of policy paradigms’ (Skogstad and Schmidt 2011, 18). Yet it is less clear how this ideational content gets translated, processed, mobilized or shaped by domestic policy dynamics. Small-N comparisons of education policy have assessed the influence of international organizations on national actors, institutions and norms, and these studies demonstrate the importance of domestic politics and the involvement of actors from outside the traditional realm of ‘high politics’ (Dakowska and Harmsen 2015; Dobbins and Knill 2009; Toens 2010; Trampusch 2009; Witte 2006). None have examined compulsory education, instead focusing on higher or vocational education (with each sector of education involving a different set of civil society actors).

9 This question emerged from a ‘partisan neutrality hypothesis’ (the null hypothesis adapted from median voter models), which suggested that political parties were not important because they do not determine which issues get on the policy agenda. Empirically, we should see no difference in issue-attention by governments of the left or right, because political parties do not ‘own’ particular issues in order to bring them to public attention once they are in power. Instead, three other factors drive policy change. First, when in government or in power, party leaders (or members of legislature) discount partisan policy preferences and ideology in favour of policy performance and electoral success (manifest in personal credit-claiming or blame avoidance behaviour). Second, new governments want to erase the policies of outgoing governments, and what drives issue attention is change in government, not partisanship. Third, political parties notwithstanding, governments are driven to act by external events, such as the media, public opinion, international events, or the economy (Baumgartner, Brouard, and Grossman 2009).
called partisan differentiation theory). Power resource theory argues that political parties (in or out of government) are important because they mobilize class interests (Esping-Andersen 1990; Huber and Stephens 2001). In essence, parties act as ‘transmission belts’ for the political demands of particular classes, with social democratic parties expanding education and conservative parties contracting educational spending. Certainly, this has helped us understand the establishment of the status quo in terms of both partisan preferences and policy outputs; it made clear that parties mattered for the historical development of education policy and for the distinct characteristics of education systems, because parties represented class divisions and formed stable coalitions with other societal interests (Ansell and Lindvall 2013). However, analyses of gross spending and early educational expansion did not make clear if parties continued to matter for well-established education systems, especially given efficiency-driven reforms that tried to redistribute funding without significantly changing overall levels of investment.

More compelling and nuanced models were needed to explain what seemed to be the ‘new politics of public investment in education’ (Busemeyer 2009a; Iversen and Stephens 2008). ‘Partisan

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10 There is also a third possibility that encompasses both the ‘partisan neutrality hypothesis’ and the ‘partisan hypothesis’ in a dynamic way: that there has been a decline in partisan influence over time, due to globalization or other factors (Boix 2000). This is an interesting question in light of policies investigated here. However, for the sake of analyzing the discrete episodes in this dissertation, I am trying to ascertain if political parties were the most significant proximate causal factor.

11 Early empirical analyses confirmed generalizations about gross levels of spending. For example, across OECD countries in 1960 and 1970, there was an inverse relationship between conservative party strength and educational spending, and the strength of parties on the right was the strongest predictor of percent GDP allocated to public education (Castles 1982, 63). Until the 1980s, there also seemed to be a stable correlation between left parties and educational spending, with social democratic parties instrumental for increases to primary schooling funding, and the ‘massification’ of secondary schooling during the post-war period (expanding both access and administrative oversight). The causal logic was that left-wing parties try to maximize redistribution between classes, with public education a means to do this (assuming progressive taxation). Public education is also a means to facilitate supply-side capitalism, so left-wing parties can pursue preferences for a big state and extensive redistribution within a capitalist system using education funding. However, there are redistributive aspects within education as well: these theories predict that social democratic parties spend more overall, but also prefer to spend on primary rather than on tertiary education (Boix 1997, 1998). It should be noted that compared to other social welfare policies, education is an inefficient redistribution mechanism because the wealthy often take disproportionate advantage of publicly-funded education, especially at higher levels (Jensen 2011). Hence the need for more nuanced explanations, such as partisan theory.
theory' argued that political parties have significant impact on public policy outputs by suggesting that governments of the left and right behave differently, and pursue different policies. Parties have issue ownership, demonstrated by left governments consistently trying to spend on welfare, the right on defense, or green parties on the environment (as examples). Beyond spending habits, governing parties try to put their issues on the agenda, and attach their name to particular policies, according to partisan ideological preferences. Parties build a reputation based on past policy stances, and represent constituencies that prioritize and dedicate attention to particular issues (Baumgartner, Brouard, and Grossman 2009). Thus, political parties in power are the important actors, not as mere transmission belts for class interests, but rather as strategic actors who use policy outputs – spending especially – to attract voters or consolidate their base (Busemeyer 2009a, 107). Empirically, partisan theory has made clear that education policy outputs are more than just the aggregation of economic preferences for particular groups of voters. Furthermore, these theories have been adept at explaining the redistributive preferences of governing parties on the left, during an era of globalization. While

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12 As Ben Ansell (2010) has shown, even if individual preferences for educational spending derive from economic factors, actual policy outcomes are driven by political bargains in which partisan ideological preferences interface with the opportunities and constraints of political institutions. Furthermore, Busemeyer (2013) demonstrates that the distribution of voter preferences for education policy is not uniform, and many factors beyond class – like age, cultural background, and so on – shape preferences on educational spending and access. Therefore, social democratic governments can no longer be certain how well they represent the economic interests of their base, when they expand education. We know even less about how contemporary conservative governments form preferences and manage education reform. Typically associated with limited public investment and promotion of market-enhancing governance reforms, conservative governments occasionally increase public investment in education, presumably when this seems less redistributive than social transfers (Ansell 2010; Jensen 2011; Lundahl 2002). Yet there might be other conditions when conservative governments invest in education, such as when the status quo incurs little material cost, but significant political costs in the short-to-medium term, like probable electoral defeat if reforms are not undertaken. It would seem that electoral competition incentivizes parties to prioritize issues and create particular kinds of public policies, in order to attract and retain certain groups of voters and get re-elected (M. G. Schmidt 1996).

13 Part of the puzzle has been why left governments try to increase spending on upper secondary or higher education, given this was an area from which elites traditionally benefitted (due to narrow access and public subsidies). There have been a number of complementary explanations for this. One is the perception of (higher) education as vocational skills-training for the working class (Iversen and Stephens 2008). Another is that education spending is an inter-temporally redistributive opportunity structure (i.e., over time lower classes benefit disproportionately from all education investments (Ansell 2008)). Related to this, social democratic governments use tertiary spending as a means to forge cross-class alliances – to open up access to tertiary education for lower classes, their core constituency, yet also provide an electoral alternative for middle classes who wish to retain
instructive for an understanding of the relationship between governing parties and education spending, we still lack information on how contemporary political parties form preferences on policies other than spending or school structure, and how they leverage preferences into policy outcomes when in government.\textsuperscript{14}

Theories of policy change that emphasize partisanship and pluralist interests remain underdeveloped for the field of education.\textsuperscript{15} The models above assume that party preferences are stable, but differ over whether those preferences are a function of fixed class interests, wider electoral strategies such as cross-class coalitions or intertemporal redistribution, or the pluralist interests of pressure groups or peak associations. Whatever assumptions guide preference formation, if partisan theories are correct then governing parties should ‘own’ issues – or aspects of issues – and have the capacity to enact pre-existing preferences, changing policy to the degree that their partisan preferences do not conform to the status quo. Aside of spending and school structure, we lack information about the relationship between parties and policy preferences, and about the relationship between partisan access to higher education (Ansell 2005). Finally, there is the argument that left wing governments are less motivated by direct redistributive preferences, than by risk assessments of skills redundancy in the working class, with (higher) education investments a kind of social insurance scheme (Jensen 2011).

\textsuperscript{14} Another possibility is an underdeveloped variant of partisan theory that I refer to as ‘pluralist-partisan theory’. This proposes that for some policy areas, governing parties cannot define their electoral opportunities solely vis-à-vis the interests of particular voters or cross-class alliances. Parties strategically consider blocs of voters, but when elections are not imminent, they consider things like policy performance and the degree to which policy choices affect powerful pressure groups. No party ‘owns’ education issues outright, but each party tries to monopolize (or ‘colonize’) certain aspects of education policy that are consistent with their alliance to powerful interest groups (rather than voting blocs alone). A pluralist-partisan theory therefore suggests that governing parties use policies to cater to their base, to build alliances, and to signal (or appease) particular pressure groups. There is little analysis of education policy that explicitly considers the link between pressure participants and political parties (one exception being Moe and Wiborg 2017). So one could look to other areas, such as health policy, to see how political parties are responsive to powerful interests within particular sectors (see Immergut 1992). If this theory is meaningful, then researchers must pay closer attention to the kinds of policies being changed (i.e., not just assessing policies that affect end-users, like spending and access, but also evaluation and governance policies). In this dissertation, pluralist-partisan theory is considered as an alternative explanation.

\textsuperscript{15} “From a political science perspective, issues such as the role of electoral politics, political institutions and government partisanship as important factors shaping educational institutions and education policy output remain under-researched” (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011, 425).
preferences and policy outcomes. In short, do parties matter for all forms of education policy change in an age of globalization, and if so, how?

1.2.3 Determinants of Educational Policy Change: Statist Explanations and Political Institutions

During the 1980s, comparative politics scholars advocated ‘bringing the state back in’ to theories of policy change, treating the state as an autonomous actor with independent policy preferences or varying capacities to affect reform.\(^{16}\) As education remains an under-explored policy area for political science, it is perhaps not surprising that it has been somewhat neglected by statist (and historical institutionalist) approaches as well.\(^{17}\) Where theories of the state and political institutions have been applied to education policy, institutions function as arenas for veto in which political representatives of interests or epistemic communities block reform. Inasmuch as institutions enable educational reform, theories of state agency and reform capacity remain underdeveloped.

In the literature on education reform, domestic political institutions have been treated as intervening variables. They are arenas where veto players block reform, with the actual reform proposals flowing from actors who can form preferences independently of institutional considerations, like international organizations or socio-economic interest groups. In other policy areas, veto player

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\(^{16}\) Initially, ‘statist’ approaches underspecified exactly who the state was, and it was seldom clear if the state was a reference to legislative structure, the bureaucracy, the high executive, or if other actors – such as the judiciary – had independent preferences or capacities. As statism developed into historical institutionalism, this approach was more adept at explaining stability rather than change, although mechanisms of institutional change have been better developed over the last decade.

\(^{17}\) With important exceptions in the work of Kathleen Thelen (2003, 2004) in the area of vocational training and Kathrin Toens (2010) in higher education. There is a parallel literature that has ‘brought the state back in’ to comparative political economy, and evaluated education in terms of its supply of skills to the broader production regime. This ‘Varieties of Capitalism’ approach has provided robust theoretical tools and testable hypotheses regarding institutional complementarities between education, the labour market and other welfare state policies (Estévez-Abe, Iversen, and Soskice 2001; Hall and Soskice 2001; Iversen and Stephens 2008; Streeck 2012; Thelen 2004). However, it offers limited theoretical application for understanding episodes of acute education reform or cross-national variance regarding degrees of change. This is largely due to the treatment of education systems as a functional component of wider political economies, with the relationship between production regime change and education policy change overdetermined by intervening variables. Moreover, this framework focuses more on vocational and higher education, emphasizes economic rather than political actors (firms especially), and highlights the stabilizing effects of institutional complementarity rather than mechanisms of change.
Theories have been useful for understanding cross-national variance in degrees of policy change, because they allow one to compare the capacity for change across highly disparate political systems, and can account for political behavior beyond institutional position (Jahn 2010; Koenig and Debus 2010, 271–72; Tsebelis 2002). However, the operationalization of veto player theory has not been especially sophisticated in the literature on education policy. If institutions are to be useful for understanding educational policy change, especially in deviant cases, then a more nuanced approach to behavior in institutions is required, as well as a more sophisticated understanding of institutional arrangements.

For starters, we must move beyond counting formal veto players in the institutions of ‘high’ politics, and begin to analyze the interface between institutions of ‘high’ politics and ‘low’ politics (such as schooling, and the educational bureaucracy). The assumption has been that the latter merely

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18 The tendency has been to assume the preferences of veto players, then count the number of formal veto players in national institutions of ‘high’ politics. This approach neglects recent innovations in veto player theory. First, insufficient attention has been paid to ideological congruence between veto players, and how a policy choice winset can vary within a given sector depending on the type of veto player and the issue. For example, Steffen Ganghof (2003, 10) has argued that political parties formulate policy preferences based primarily on office-seeking motivations, with policy-seeking as secondary, and accounting for this can dramatically change (and expand) the decision winset. Second, the degree to which actors cohere as veto players has been relatively neglected. Tommasi, Scartascini, and Stein (2014) demonstrate that a high number of (incongruent) veto players need not necessarily result in policy stability, when one accounts for time. Under certain conditions, such as when political institutions function as repeated games with relatively stable participants, there are opportunities for strategic behaviour such as log-rolling, which can increase cohesion as a counterweight to ideological incongruence. Finally, counting formal veto players makes little distinction between types of veto players (such as institutional or partisan veto players; agenda-setters; formal or informal types of vetoes). Recognizing variations in veto-type is a theoretical innovation that was suggested by Johannes Lindvall (2010), who distinguished between veto players based on their institutional arrangement. *De jure* (or formal) veto players are constitutionally-enabled to tread the halls of political power – the institutional and partisan veto players who are elected or appointed to govern, create policies, and represent the interests of their constituents or society at large. *De facto* (informal) veto players are bureaucratic or societal stakeholders with privileged access to the governing executive, and vary by policy area. Each has the power to maintain (or change) the policy status quo, but their veto depends on institutional variations in opportunity. Even in the earliest incarnations of veto player theory, George Tsebelis (2002, 34–36) briefly discussed agenda-setters as a type of veto player that can propose ‘take it or leave it’ offers to other veto players, their significance declining as policy stability increases, and inclining as they move to the ideological center of the winset. However, agenda-setting (and agenda-management) could be much better fleshed out for veto theories, and for theories of education policy change.

19 An early assumption was that education was naturally a politicized issue area, meaning that “to effect educational change, all groups must move outside the educational field to engage in political interaction at the national level” (Archer 1979, 618). Policy change was thus generated in ‘high’ political institutions, with the status quo merely reinforced by the size and complexity of education systems, the autonomy of policy implementation, strong pressure groups and entrenched interests, and perennial shortage of funding (Ambler 1987; Hall 1983).
anchor the status quo, even more so if prestigious or specialized agencies are allowed to operate unquestioned within their own paradigm (Carpenter 2001). Yet a bureaucracy made accountable for policy failure can actually undermine the status quo, especially if they perceive a correlation between broad reform trends and ‘locally-generated ideas’ (Blyth 2007, 764). For example, strong federalism was thought to be non-conducive to policy change in general, because of the higher number of veto players or additional veto points. However, Margaret Archer (1984) found that decentralization could be conducive to education reform, although innovations were due to bureaucratic (and not political) decentralization, where policy innovation can take place “in the relative shelter of a bureaucracy rather than in the bright lights of public debate” (Bleich 1998, 96). Undoubtedly, institutions of high politics are an important part of the policy-making process, but we need to know more about the role of the educational bureaucracy and sector-specific policy design institutions, which are understudied in many areas of public policy (Jenson 2012). In some sense, ‘bringing the state back in’ to explanations of education policy change means evaluating the preferences and agency of the permanent bureaucracy, and examining sector-specific policy design institutions.

1.2.4 Conclusions: Where from here?

Research on educational policy change remains underdeveloped in political science. Gaps in our understanding of education policy-making include where precisely internationalization pressures are felt in the domestic sphere, how political parties capture educational interests, and the relationship between institutions and policy change. When considering the determinants of education policy change, researchers should heed the following:

“Moving beyond the assumption of strategic and rational actors, on the one hand, and connecting research into reform policies and politics in the context of internationalization and Europeanization with the analysis and theories of institutional change...on the other, are, in our view, the two main challenges with which this strand of literature is confronted. In this more actor-oriented perspective, questions of timing and sequencing are of interest, as it is still unclear why we observe this growing influence of international organizations increasingly since the 1990s and not earlier” (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011, 424).
Analyses of education policy-making which take these issues seriously might also illuminate areas where
generalized theories of public policy change are also lacking, such as roles for bureaucracy and public-
sector interest groups within the institutions of policy-making. In the next section, I present an
argument about how changes to policy instruments can be explained by interactions between sectoral
policy design institutions and decision-makers in the macro-political arena.

1.3 My Argument: An Agenda-management Model of Policy Change

In this dissertation, I propose an agenda-management model of policy change, during reform episodes
when the policy status quo has been discredited, yet the political status quo remains influential. This
model explains the variance between managed and obstructed reforms to education systems, under a
particular confluence of policy-making conditions. I argue that sector-specific policy design institutions
(‘policy subsystems’) can manage the reform agenda in macro-political arenas if they are inclusive,
coherent, and stable. To substantiate this argument, I introduce a new type of subsystem: a policy
oligopoly. A policy oligopoly is discernible from other types of subsystems by its inclusive structure, its
coherent problem interpretation, and its mechanisms for managing conflict. This type of stable
subsystem has the capacity to coherently frame policy issues and control policy development venues,
and in so doing, draw the attention of high-level decision-makers (and other actors in the macro-political
arena) towards technical aspects of an issue, and away from aspects which might discredit the political
status quo. Executive decision-makers then adopt the design recommendations which emerge from an
oligopoly, resulting in a significant change in instrumental logic in lieu of other forms of policy change.

20 “One area which requires more work, for example, concerns the links between the nature of the
political system and its policy ‘subsystem’...too often the features and workings of political systems have
been poorly handled in public policy studies. Mainstream political science, for example, has often dealt
with policies as simple, direct outputs of political dynamics...[yet] policy dynamics, and political agency
and structures, are strictly intertwined and political and policy arenas very often overlap to a large extent.
This requires further investigation, since it is in this intertwining and overlapping that the various different
drivers of change have the chance to be productive” (Howlett and Migone 2011, 60).
Meanwhile, actors in unstable and more exclusionary subsystems present conflicting images of problems, with some actors resorting to the risky political strategy of venue-shopping to bring their framing of issues to the attention of influential decision-makers or the public. The result is that outcomes are less predictable – unintended consequences can lead to radical transformation or blocked reforms. Thus, an agenda-management model posits that a policy oligopoly greatly increases the likelihood of a significant change in instrumental policy logics, given conditions of state insulation of a sector and acute external pressure from globalization.

This model advances three inter-related claims about the relationship between sectoral policy design institutions and a distinct form of policy change. First, I make the assertion that we must better integrate our conceptualizations of policy change and stability, to account for changes to instrumental logics. The scope conditions and change dynamics found in these cases point to the need for descriptions of a qualitatively different forms of policy change, namely ‘change in instrumentation’. Second, I argue that subsystem politics determine this form of policy change, meaning that our analytical focus should be on ‘meso-level’ institutions of policy design rather than variables in the macro-level political arena. Third, I introduce the concept of a ‘policy oligopoly’, a subsystem type that builds on Baumgartner and Jones’s notion of a policy monopoly, the cohesive community of experts and policy implementers who try to manage issues on the policy agenda. Policy oligopolies are sector-specific policy design institutions. They direct attention within issues and manage the policy agenda in order to affect significant change to the logic of policy instruments, in lieu of a regression to the status quo or a re-orientation of policy aims. The agenda-management model advances these claims, yet this is not a generalized theory of policy change, nor of generalized instrument change. Rather, it is a descriptive middle-range theory about changes to instrumental logic under a particular confluence of conditions.
1.3.1 Middle-range Theorizing: Scope Conditions and Forms of Policy Change

An agenda-management model is a middle range theory that explains successful changes to instrumental logic under distinct, though not unique, conditions for reform.\textsuperscript{21} The phenomenon to be explained is the significant change of policy instruments in the field of compulsory education, given particular historical and institutional conditions. However, the arguments presented in this model can illuminate policy-making processes elsewhere, beyond these cases and beyond education policy. Therefore, this dissertation proposes a modest form of theory-building which is compatible and complementary to more general approaches to public policy, especially the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework (PEF) proposed by Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones (1993, 2009). Below I develop my first argument, that we must account better for more intermediate forms of policy change, with a discussion of the scope conditions for this type of reform, and why descriptions of policy change should be supplemented with a new category: changes to instrumental logic.

This analysis pertains to policies reformed during periods of acute external pressure, within policy sectors that are highly insulated by state sovereignty. Modern welfare states seem besieged by globalization, yet not all public policies encounter external pressures in the same way. Some sectors must contend with persistent signals of a slow degradation of policy capacity, effectiveness or efficiency. Other sectors experience sudden and very public depictions of policy failure, which emerge from credible sources (often outside of government and even the national sphere) who pressure policy-makers into reconsidering the status quo. An agenda-management model is relevant for the latter,

\textsuperscript{21} Middle range theories analyze a specific set of phenomena across a limited universe of cases, and thus are a crucial addition to the single case study and generalized theories of political or policy outcomes. Grand theories, such as the structural-functionalism of Talcott Parsons, seeks to explain general phenomena at the societal level. Narrower are general approaches to public policy, such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework or Punctuated Equilibrium Framework, which explain the policy process across many sectors and a large range of political jurisdictions. Middle range theory is comparatively ‘small-N’ in terms of both cases and policy areas. It can inform about a finite set of cases (such as Western Europe, or the OECD), facing certain political conditions (such as the effects of globalization), and for certain policy areas (such as social policy, or labour market policy).
where policy actors must react relatively quickly, rather than adjust slowly. Acute pressure is a condition of reform and not itself an agent of change – when the policy status quo is discredited, it is national actors who decide what to pay attention to, and how to intervene in a policy area.

The other conditions for this model involve state insulation. This is actually two conditions, because the features of the policy-making regime and of the policy area must combine to produce a context in which the state insulates a sector from external pressures. The political status quo is resilient in public policy sectors where the state has both a national interest and high degree of sovereignty, and where provision of a public good leaves limited space for governance by market or other actors. As a condition of reform, the insulating state has certain characteristic features. One is that state activity dominates the sector: because the state has taken responsibility for provision of a public good, it devotes considerable resources to it, including human resources. Another feature is that elected government (and to a lesser degree, bureaucracy) are held responsible not only for provision of the public good, but also for shielding state employees from the pressures of marketization and globalization. These features of the policy area and policy-making regime mean that governance becomes especially salient for reforms that threaten to alter the political status quo. Political interventions that affect how the ‘implementation experts’ (teachers, doctors, nurses, local administrators, etc.) do their job or understand their role can have long-lasting effects and are therefore subject to scrutiny by various actors. Notably, state insulation exists along a continuum, not as a binary. An insulating state and powerful political status quo can be a strong buffer, but it is not an

22 On one end of the spectrum are sectors that are very highly insulated because policy implementers are not just state employees, they are also skilled workers with relatively high levels of autonomy from government decision-makers. Typical examples (and potential objects of analysis) include health care, education, and public transport, although this will vary across welfare states. On the other end of the spectrum are sectors with strong market dynamics, yet with some smaller role for an insulating state. Relatively absent the condition of state insulation, there might be only a few elected officials and bureaucrats who act as a buffer between ‘end-users’ of policy (such as citizens, consumers, firms, and so on) and external pressures (such as markets, globalization effects or transnational actors). Under these circumstances, decision-makers are likely to be concerned about effects of policy on end-users, and little concerned about how policies affect the handful of state employees charged with implementing policy or regulating a market.
impermeable barrier: state insulation reinforces the policy status quo, but cannot reproduce it indefinitely.

The scope conditions of acute external pressure and state insulation (involving regime-type and policy-type) created political ambiguity during the reform episodes under examination. Key concepts in PEF (selective attention; agenda-setting; framing; venue-shopping; policy monopolies) were evident during these punctuations to policy equilibria, when problems were identified and various actors strategized to solve them and establish a new policy status quo. For many such punctuations, the problems that draw attention have a technical dimension as well as engender ideological conflict, because powerful actors often disagree over cognitive ideas and normative ideologies. What is distinct about the sub-set of policy reform episodes examined with an agenda-management model, is that the policy status quo was punctuated by an event or actor outside the apparatus of the state, and this suggested a core governance problem that also should be addressed (even if implicitly). In other words, discrediting the policy status quo implied a critique of the political status quo, because the state seems to have failed some test of their governance capability. The circumstances described here are not unique to education policy, nor to the cases in question. Where they do exist, acute external pressure and state insulation demand that we focus on particular aspects within reform proposals, such as policies that affect the rationales of governance and implementation (i.e., instrumental logics).

Given the scope conditions above, the range of potential policy change outcomes remains large yet finite. This analysis examines one such form of policy change, change in instrumentation, and compares it across political jurisdictions. Where such change in instrumental logics is successful, new policies serve the existing political status quo – they are a means for political actors to achieve their

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23 Absent conditions like war, economic collapse, or technological revolution, it is rare to see radical changes that re-orient the aims of public policy and redefine the interests of stakeholders in a given sector. A more likely path of reform, even significant reform, entails changes to programs or instruments that can – though not must – lead to ‘downstream’ transformations in overarching policy goals, the politics of policy-making, or even the polity itself.
abstract policy aims. Yet they are also innovative in that they introduce new programmatic methods, evaluation mechanisms, or modes of governance. I argue that we must consider a significant change in instrumental logic as a dependent variable in its own right, because it is qualitatively different from incremental adjustment or paradigm shift, and determined by change dynamics which are neither wholly incremental nor altogether disruptive.

1.3.2 Sectoral Institutions and Subsystem Politics

Much of the scholarship on educational policy change (and policy change more generally) has focussed on the macro-political arena and the variables that matter there: ideas and social learning; partisanship in legislatures, or veto players or points in the institutions of ‘high politics’. However, the notion that policy can be explained as ‘simple, direct outputs of [macro-]political dynamics’ is misleading because policies themselves are increasingly complex and multifaceted (Howlett and Migone 2011, 60). To understand more complex forms of policy change, one must analyse factors beyond the macro-political. Explaining change is not just about which issues draw the attention of executive or legislative decision-makers, but also how an issue is framed on the agenda, and by whom. Policy design thus becomes an important factor for decision-makers, with types of change contingent on policy designs which can solve pressing problems without shifting blame onto those with the power to block solutions. Therefore, what is required is greater analysis of the institutions responsible for developing and preparing the policy reform agenda, and of the politics which determine the structure and stability of these institutions. Sectoral-level policy design institutions – policy subsystems – are essential for explaining changes to the logic of policy instruments.

An analysis of subsystem politics entails conceptualizing subsystems as well as their politics. A policy subsystem is an entity behind the government high executive; it is “a stable, tight and continuing arrangement” involving high-level political decision-makers with those that must implement policy decisions, such as bureaucrats and representatives of public-sector interest groups (Jordan and Maloney
1997, 559). Subsystems allow elected politicians and high civil servants to focus attention, avoid problem-overload, and manage the complexity of issues (for which they are seldom experts). As institutions, subsystems have been treated as relatively uncontroversial aids for the ‘parallel processing’ of information (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 44). However, subsystems are not just providers of information, they are also potential sources for conflict or cooperation. On one hand, subsystems reduce uncertainty regarding cause-and-effect and help solve technical problems, on the other, they can reduce (or produce) uncertainty regarding the competition between different ideas or partisan interests. In effect, a stable subsystem with a coherent interpretation of a problem can manipulate the agenda with which high-level decision-makers operate, while unstable subsystems will struggle to control that agenda, meaning design decisions get hashed out in the macro-political arena. This makes an enormous difference in terms of change outcomes. Stable, well-structured subsystems can manage reform agendas (set by others), because they can combine innovation with the status quo, such as a significant change in instrumental logic. Unstable subsystems with conflicted images of a policy area will have unpredictable results: they might lead to paradigmatic transformation of the policy area, or to obstructed reforms that render policies ‘stagnant’. Subsystem politics can shape the relationships between policy actors and political decision-makers in significant and (often) predictable ways, and therefore, I argue that our analytical focus must be on policy design institutions like subsystems, rather than macro-political variables, when given scope conditions prevail.

In terms of integrating this argument into a middle-range theory of change in instrumental logics, policy subsystems are ‘meso-level’ institutions which connect the ‘micro-level’ of individual and small group behaviour to the ‘macro-level’ of national policy outputs and international trends. At the micro-level, individual actors form policy preferences, and behave in strategic ways to amend or achieve those preferences (vis-à-vis policy learning, rational utility-maximizing, and so on). Meso-level institutions can help us to understand strategic behaviour at this level, such as why an actor might
decide against vetoing a policy that ostensibly contradicts their ideological or partisan interests. Actors perceive their interests differently (and re-order their preferences) if an institution offers policy designs that are stable, predictable, and suitable for credit-claiming, even if those policies are ideologically sub-optimal. At the macro-level, states appear as unitary actors susceptible to the diffusion of international ideas and trends. Meso-level institutions can help us understand the divergent behaviour of states, such as why some political jurisdictions do not conform to expectations regarding policy change or the internationalization of education policy. Policy change outcomes at the national level can be more comprehensible when one looks beyond the macro-level political arena of government executives, legislatures, and international organizations, to the types of cooperation and competition occurring within meso-level institutions. 

Just as a middle-range theory can bridge a detailed analysis of a single case study to general theories applicable across a larger-N, meso-level analysis can explain the connection between the behaviours of individuals, and the activities of states.

1.3.3 Policy Oligopoly

Having established the importance of sectoral institutions for changes to instrumental logics, I introduce the novel concept of a ‘policy oligopoly’, a stable subsystem-type that allows actors within it to collectively manage the reform agenda in spite of disparate educational aims. This notion is based on Baumgartner and Jones’s idea of a policy monopoly, a cohesive community of experts and implementers within a given policy sector, who try to monopolize understanding of issues and problems. 

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24 Building on an ‘externalization thesis’ adapted from Niklas Luhmann by Florian Waldow (2009, 2012), I suggest that transnational ideas and knowledge function as a kind of ‘external irritant’ to relatively ‘closed’ educational policy subsystems. Actors within a policy community might use knowledge generated from outside the system (as a point of reference, to legitimize preferences, and so on) but this externalization is instigated and processed from within the system. In other words, education policy is often a distinctly national (or sub-national) affair, with clear and well-defended jurisdictions, and well-established domestic policy communities. Incidentally, externalization need not be transnational, it could also be intra-national (across sub-national policy communities) or even cross-sectional (borrowing from other policy area subsystems). It just so happened to be transnational in the case of PISA.

25 Conceptually, policy oligopolies (and policy monopolies) are not to be confused with monopolies and oligopolies in economic theory. These economic concepts have influenced subsystem-type in a heuristic way, in that policy
oligopolies – indeed, subsystems in general – are an analytical concept rather than a formal institution in the policy arena. But if these concepts have causal effect in empirical reality, then one should see evidence of them in terms of policy outcomes (i.e., one could hypothesize forms of policy change based on subsystem type), as well as evidence independent of outcomes (i.e., there would be institutional and behavioural indications that a policy oligopoly existed).

What makes oligopolies distinct from other types of subsystems – and a novel concept for understanding policy change – is how they vary regarding the core features of a subsystem, and how this variance affects policy outcomes. Oligopolies are subsystems for which compromise is effectively ‘baked-in’ to the institutional structure and communication procedures. They have an inclusive yet bounded membership, can agree on certain aspects of problems and solutions (such as instruments) without full consensus on aims, and can manage conflict in ways that include rather than exclude diverse viewpoints. This is not to suggest that oligopolies are the product of goodwill. They are likely borne of necessity, due to pressures of institutional complementarity, or new information and ideas which challenge powerful actors’ capacity to design policy alone. Yet policy oligopolies can achieve outcomes involving compromise, such as the managed reform found in changes of instrumentation.

1.3.4 Summing up the Argument

To sum up, an agenda-management model of instrumental policy change is a means to understanding a new dimension of change in formal policy: significant change in instrumental logic. In order to explain this phenomenon, we need to look at the politics of subsystems, and to conceptually develop a new kind of meso-level policy design institution: the policy oligopoly. This model, and the arguments therein, explain the forms of policy change in France and Germany following poor PISA results. It also has a

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oligopolies describe a small, stable group of political actors trying to dominate (‘monopolize’) a social field, given limited internal competition. This is where the similarity ends. Policy oligopolies (and monopolies) need not lead to sub-Pareto outcomes, can persist in spite of inefficiency or instability, and pertain to images of a policy area, not to the behaviour of firms in a market (Kreps 1990, 325–26).
number of implications for our understanding of the relationship between the status quo and policy change. It is to these theoretical contributions I turn to next.

1.4 Contributions to Scholarship on Public Policy

Beyond the merits of explaining an important set of empirical phenomena and analyzing a policy area underexplored in political science, this dissertation develops a middle-range theory of policy change that makes three contributions to the study of public policy.

First, an agenda-management model contributes to new conceptualizations of the relationship between policy change and the status quo, by positing likely conditions for an intermediate form of policy change during reform episodes when other forms of policy change were anticipated. This finding builds on and refines the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework. For some punctuations to policy equilibria, there will be modes of change where existing policy aims are combined with innovative implementation logics to produce significant yet not paradigmatic policy change. Thus, not all punctuations are fully transformative. Nor are punctuations necessarily unpredictable: certain types of sectoral institution can render volatile reform circumstances more stable and calculable. Finding a new form of policy change also suggests that models within the PEF should not always select on the dependent variable. Rather than define a punctuation by outcomes that are transformative of the status quo, one might instead focus on disruptive episodes where radical policy change might be expected but not always delivered.

There has been much progress in our understanding of the relationship between stability and change in institutions, but less developed is our understanding of policy change dynamics – with the meanings of incrementalism vis-à-vis transformative policy change becoming the subject of recent debate. This dissertation contributes to this discussion by proposing concrete examples of significant change that do not establish an entirely new status quo.

Second, the comparative study of meso-level (policy design) institutions begins to establish a range of cases when subsystem politics is likely to matter for policy change. Variables in the macro-
political arena will continue to have much salience for theories of policy change, yet this dissertation explains how certain types of insulated policy community can translate these variables into reform preferences, and given the right conditions, managed reform agendas. The close and comparative analysis of a positive and a negative case of change in instrumentation, allows us to see the ways in which subsystem politics can guide – or misguide – the strategies of high level decision-makers when a policy area is in the spotlight. An agenda-management model of policy change will prevail under a relatively narrow set of conditions and in the presence of distinct causal factors, but those conditions and factors are not unique to German education policy (post-PISA). This dissertation proffers the descriptive building blocks for a middle-range theory of (limited) policy change, and begins to establish the institutional conditions and subsystemic causal factors that exist in cases of changed instrumentation.

Third, with the novel concept of a ‘policy oligopoly’, this dissertation introduces an identifiable and causally-significant form of policy design institution which exists (conceptually) at the sectoral level of the policy development process. Existing analytical frameworks provide an elemental description of the relationship between subsystems and specific policy content during periods of relative stability. In short, insulated communities use content to frame issues and set the policy agenda, or else use content to build and sustain coalitions by advocating for particular policy beliefs. However, what is not adequately explained, is how the form of these institutions relates to the form of policy change. Policy content notwithstanding, oligopolies are structured and stabilized in a way that allows them to manage agendas and shape reform outcomes during punctuations in the policy equilibrium. The policy oligopoly is a bounded concept, and its application is limited to scenarios with particular antecedent historical and institutional conditions, and certain contingent circumstances. However, this scenario is not exclusive to ‘post-PISA’ German education, so this dissertation begins to elaborate the conditions and circumstances where subsystem politics matter, and policy oligopolies have effect. As a contribution to our
understanding of changes to the instrumental logic of policy, the policy oligopoly is a concrete analytical tool which can illuminate the ways that meso-level policy-design institutions affect policy, and speculate on the ways that institutional and policy change might be related.

1.5 Methods and Evidence

The purpose of this dissertation is to develop a middle-range theory for intermediate forms of policy change, by focussing on a narrow set of political phenomena: how a change in instrumental logic occurs when an insulating state comes under acute external pressure. Policies pertaining to compulsory education are a good place to begin, because this policy area – normally well-insulated and resilient – experienced acute pressure to change in a number of countries, during the 2000s. The combination of a powerful status quo, acute pressure for change, and unexpected outcomes in ‘deviant’ cases suggests that education policy would be suitable for preliminary theory-building for changes to instrumentation.

1.5.1 Research Design

For education, there have been two general schools of thought for defining and measuring policy change. One strategy has involved a kind of ‘comparative statics’ approach, as used in the literature on the internationalization of education policy (Dobbins and Knill 2009; Jakobi, Teltemann, and Windzio 2010; Knill and Lehmkuhl 2002; Martens, Knodel, and Windzio 2014; Martens and Weymann 2007). This ‘spatial’ comparison assesses change by comparing snapshots of (national) policies to an external barometer, with cross-national variance indicated by the degree of convergence or divergence from some standard or model. It is useful for observing larger cross-national trends, such as the internationalization or globalization of education policy, but less instructive for assessing the particular (or surprising) dynamics of cases that converge/diverge against expectations (i.e., for explaining outliers). Another strategy involves internal comparisons of single cases over time (the ‘case study approach’), with variance indicated by an increase or decrease in some measurable feature – preferably a feature also commensurable across cases, such as spending. This ‘temporal’ comparison can be useful
for describing variance across education systems, especially for early institutional development (i.e.,
how the status quo was established). It is less helpful for explaining reform dynamics in well-established
systems given common ‘external’ stimuli. Evaluating the mechanisms that cause cross-national variation
in re-instrumentation requires a different kind of methodology: a kind of ‘comparative-dynamics’
approach where within-case variance (between status quos) is also compared cross-case, as a variance
in degrees of policy change. A comparative-dynamic approach has yet to be applied to a cross-national
analysis of education policy, and doing so allows the tracking of single cases dynamically (comparing
status quos within-case) while also comparing variance spatially (comparing type of change in one case
to type of change in another).

This qualitative and comparative research design has embedded methodological tools and logics
that can help one draw causal inferences from small-N comparison. Within each case, I use process-
tracing to analyze empirical evidence on patterns of policy development and conjunctures of events,
hypothesizing on the causal mechanisms that could explain each outcome. Process-tracing is a kind of
analytical narrative that captures within-case variation over time, in order to ‘test’ variation against
competing theoretical explanations and encourage assessment of how change occurred, rather than just
why it occurred.26 This method involves “the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and
conjunctures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about
causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case” (Checkel and Bennett 2014, 7). By carefully
analyzing processual links, and discriminating between alternative explanations, this within-case method

26 Process-tracing is particularly effective for ‘combinatory and conditional’ accounts of change in which
antecedent conditions, interactive variables and processes seem to matter for the outcome, and where the focus is
on how change happened. This is distinct from ‘nomothetic and positivist’ accounts of change in which the
variance between isolated (independent and dependent) variables seems to matter, and where the focus is on why
change happens (Capano 2009). Moreover, process-tracing implies more than historical narrative. For example,
the comparative-statics approach tends to treat history as linear and additive rather than iterative: events simply
follow one another, with history as a sequence rather than a process. An ontology of change (rather than of just
sequence) takes historical irreversibility seriously, and calls for a different methodological approach that
recognizes irreversibility and periodization, one way being to treat policy reform episodes as ‘re-iterated problem-
solving’ (Haydu 1998; Rayner 2009).
derives explanatory leverage from internal validity rather than from assessment of ‘treatment’ by exogenous (independent) variables (Schimmelfennig 2014). In practice, process tracing relies on historiographical forms of evidence, such as interview transcripts, primary and archival documents, and secondary analyses (George and Bennett 2005, 6). Yet it is more than just historical detective work. Rather, it involves the construction of hypotheses from the observable implications of various causal mechanisms, then the testing of alternative explanations against one other on the basis of observed intervening variables or indicators of causal process. One begins by considering all plausible explanations – some of which could be in extant literature – which make implicit or explicit theoretical claims regarding independent variables, or the causal roles of agents or structural factors. The researcher is then critical of all explanations, attempting to disconfirm biases towards preferred models. The object is to derive hypotheses which are brittle, and thus falsifiable by observable evidence that has probative value. Ultimately, evidence is sufficient when ‘Bayesian-inspired criteria’ are met: a smoking-gun test, coupled with failed hoop tests for alternative explanations, can provide the researcher with a high (though not absolute) degree of confidence in a particular theory. Although there is always the risk of omitted variable bias in small-N research, the researcher overcomes this by examining diverse and independent streams of evidence, by corroborating sources and triangulating data, and reaching the point of evidentiary ‘saturation’. Process tracing is a key technique for capturing causal mechanisms in action, a research logic that functions beyond historiography and beside the logic of frequentist statistics.

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27 Notably, it is seldom possible to get 100% confirmation of a mechanism or model. Even a proverbial ‘smoking-gun’ is not conclusive, because causal mechanisms are rarely observable (except indirectly). However, our hypotheses about them can generate observable and testable implications, and from these, one can devise ‘hoop tests’ to disqualify certain explanations. Hoop tests, coupled with compelling (albeit circumstantial) evidence that positively supports a particular set of hypotheses, can provide a high degree of confidence in a particular model (Checkel and Bennett 2014; Van Evera 1997). Evidence can always be further probed – or new evidence discovered – which leads to the falsification or modification of a theory, yet the method yields clear expectations and indicators for falsifiability. The point here is that process tracing offers a robust method for evaluating rival explanations, yet also allows for amendment of models in light of more or better evidence.
An additional aspect of the research design used in this dissertation is cross-case analysis, in which the logic of Mill’s joint method of agreement and difference guides a kind of comparative process tracing. The comparative analysis adheres to a logic of Most Different Systems Design when selecting cases, and then a logic of Most Similar Systems Design when assessing the inner workings of each case. Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) affirms that a shared variable in two dissimilar cases can account for similar categories of outcomes (here, this refers to similar attempts at re-instrumentation). Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) accounts for cross-case variance between actual policy change outcomes, by establishing the independent variable or causal mechanism that mattered most for the realized degree of policy change. Process tracing typically proceeds through a combination of induction and deduction – even within-case – yet comparative process-tracing further leverages these different research logics, in order to draw stronger inferences via a comparison of processual evidence across cases. Where cases are not well-explained by extant theory, inductive process tracing uses within-case evidence to develop hypotheses. These hypotheses can then generate observable and testable implications not only regarding other within-case phenomena, but also for the other case, allowing one to deduce the presence or absence of theorized causal mechanisms (Checkel and Bennett 2014, 8). Whereas process tracing renders a high degree of confidence due to internal validity, the comparative method reinforces these findings through tests of external validity.28

Thus, comparative process-tracing provides greater explanatory leverage for singling out one causal process over others. Process tracing addresses the limits of Mill’s methods because it can confirm the viability of mechanisms for each case even when outcomes differ or pathways diverge, while the comparative method can leverage external validity. Comparative process tracing also reduces the

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28 It is not necessary to have external validity to have a high degree of confidence in research findings, however. “Indeed, a theory or explanation derived inductively from a case does not necessarily need to be tested against a different case for us to have confidence in the theory; rather, it can be tested against different and independent evidence in the case from which it was derived” (Checkel and Bennett 2014, 13).
likelihood that omitted variables explain the variance in outcomes, vis-à-vis a close examination of the causal processes which led from independent to dependent variables. In practice, one begins with immersion in the details of each case, colloquially known as ‘soaking and poking’, in order to develop ‘proto-hypotheses’ that must be tested for their plausibility. These hypotheses can then be tested cross-case, using evidence that is fully independent from the evidence that initially gave rise to those hypotheses, and proceeding by a deductive method to eliminate (or modify) hypotheses. The ‘joint method’ used in conjunction with process-tracing reveals not only the most plausible explanation for why reform was attempted, it also explains how change actually occurred in each case.

1.5.2 Case Selection

Given the methodology above, there were two dimensions which guided case selection: temporal and spatial. Temporal case selection refers to the ‘PISA moment’: why do we see these particular forms and processes of policy change after PISA shock, and not before? Spatial case selection refers to a comparison between Germany and France following PISA shocks: why these countries and not others? I deal with each in turn.

As a ‘temporal’ case, PISA was selected because it presents a test of theories about the relationship between internationalization and national policy change. PISA was a kind of exogenous shock with unique characteristics for contributing to the internationalization of education policy. It was also the discursive reference point for attempts at policy change in several countries. PISA appeared to be a critical juncture for new forms of policy change, such as re-instrumentation, and national actors identified PISA as a primary reason for attempting such change. It was thus a ‘most-likely’ case for dramatic policy change in response to internationalization. However, the variance between attempted and actual reform suggests that we must further assess the validity and scope conditions of competing

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MSSD rarely controls for all but one potentially causal factor, so process tracing can establish that other differences between the cases do not account for the difference in their outcomes (Bennett and Checkel 2014, 29)
theories of policy change. Some national policy frameworks encountered (or induced) acute pressure from PISA and changed, while others did not, and this invites closer examination of PISA as a case for theory testing (Eckstein 1975; George and Bennett 2005, 75).

As ‘spatial’ cases, Germany and France were selected because their outcomes were not what traditional theories would anticipate, and thus offer opportunity for theory-building. Along with a subset of other countries that underperformed in international ordinal rankings, Germany and France were ‘an instance of a class of events’ (George and Bennett 2005, 17). They were comparable to one other in terms of attempted outcomes and general antecedent conditions (i.e., an insulated area of the welfare state deemed as failing by an international organization). However, they were also ‘deviant’ or ‘outlier’ cases because they did not conform to theoretical expectations of policy change. Given the pressurized circumstances, France had the structural and contextual conditions that one associates with rapid and significant transformation of a policy framework, yet they were incapable of affecting even significant change to instrumental logic. Germany had the conditions one would associate with a resilient status quo, maintained by traditional ideas and partisan stalemate, although had the surprising outcome of successful change of instrumentation. The scope conditions establish the universe of possible cases where successful re-instrumentation could be induced. Placing Germany and France within this universe, their cross-case dissimilarity regarding welfare states and policy-making regimes (with differences in policy legacies, structures of education, demographic shift, macro-political institutions, and so on), narrow the causal pathways to a handful of mechanisms common to both cases. The fact that the case with the most impediments could affect re-instrumentation and the case with the fewest hurdles could not, suggests that some process – as yet theoretically undeveloped – explains the outcomes for both. Individually, Germany and France could be analyzed as heuristic case studies, useful for identifying new variables or causal mechanisms (George and Bennett 2005, 75). Together, they point
to a common but as yet unknown process or set of mechanisms, which can induce – yet not necessarily produce – a significant change in instrumental logic.

1.5.3 Evidence

The types of evidence used for comparative process-tracing were both intensive and extensive. This evidence ranged from expert and participant interviews, to close reading of primary policy documents, to analysis of secondary materials such as academic publications and media reports. Elite interviews are a key method of data-gathering in process tracing, allowing the researcher to accurately reconstruct sets of events. My method of identifying interviewees involved mapping the individual and collective actors directly involved with the policy-making episodes, and then contacting as many as possible to ensure a diversity of perspectives on each policy-making process. I also proceeded using a ‘snowball’ sampling technique, having interviewees direct me to other participants or experts. The 58 interviewees, some of whom were interviewed on more than one occasion, were comprised of educational experts, elected politicians, civil servants at the national and sub-national level, policy advisers with NGOs and international organizations, academics, representatives of teachers’ unions and associations, and specialized journalists. The interviews were semi-structured to ensure that I could direct the conversation towards the issues I was trying to explain, yet also allowing interviewees to focus on topics they felt were important. I continued the interview process until I reached the point of saturation, in which interviews began to yield variations on previous responses (see Appendix G: Interview Methods).

Beyond interviews, the research built on primary documents, including legislation, official policy documents, archived meeting minutes, historical archives of media sources, and reports or white papers from sub-national and national ministries or international organizations (see appendix H: Primary Documents). Evidence from primary sources was further corroborated by secondary literature from French and German educational experts and journalists. The range and depth of primary and secondary evidence allowed me to construct an accurate analytical narrative for each case, highly substantiated yet
also reflecting a diversity of perspectives, which then ensured that I could make valid and reliable comparisons between the case analyses. Analysis of the evidence met the standards of current best practice in process tracing: consideration of alternative explanations; safeguarding against confirmation bias; amassing of considerable amounts of evidence from varied sources including archival research and interviews; and combining process tracing with cross-case comparison (see Waldner 2014).

Evidence gleaned from interviews and other primary sources has probative value for building and assessing alternative explanations, but the sources themselves must also be probed for reliability. Evaluating sources of evidentiary bias – such as adjudicating between competing claims made by interviewees – was guided by the standards suggested by Marc Trachtenberg (2006), namely: attention to issues of context and authorship, assessment of the instrumental motivations of sources, and consideration of availability and accessibility of evidence. In practice, this meant employing multiple strategies for verifying the reliability and availability of source material. For primary documents, the key was to avoid misunderstanding the context or purpose of a source. One strategy for overcoming issues of context and authorship was triangulation: using other data sources – elite interviews, especially – to corroborate information.30 Another strategy involved analysis of meta-data: ‘interrogating’ source material for descriptors of who produced it and why.31

The latter strategy also pertained when assessing the reliability of other types of primary sources, such as elite interviews. While preparing for interviews, I considered how problems of mistaken recollection or misrepresentation of role might distort my findings. When evaluating the instrumental

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30 Elites who were directly involved in the policy process can be asked to confirm, deny or elaborate on the context, intention, or purpose of ambiguous primary documents. Moreover, interviews also allow the researcher to move beyond written accounts, which might only suggest an ‘official’ version of events.

31 For key documents, analysis of meta-data was guided by the criteria established by George and Bennett (2005, 99), including who is speaking (for example, are the authors identifiable individuals, or a more ‘anonymous’ groups such as a ministerial department)? To whom are they speaking (for example, is it for a private or public audience)? For what purpose are they speaking (for example, is the document intended as descriptive or prescriptive)? And what are the circumstances under which this document was produced (for example, was it produced when issues were ‘politicized’ or ‘administrative’)?
motives of interviewees, I followed Bennett and George’s criteria for analyzing any primary source (see footnote 31). I also considered criteria suggested by Philip Davies (2001) for evaluating the reliability of interviewees: whether they were a first-hand witness, what level of access they had to the events in question (with senior elites deemed more reliable), and if they had a previous record of reliability. Finally, as a ‘validity’ measure of interviews, I considered the degree to which an interviewee was representative of a larger population of elites. It is impossible to interview every individual involved in a policy process spanning a decade or more, yet one can ascertain whether the basic preferences or biases of a given actor align with the expected (and often publicized) positions of collective actors on those issues (Tansey 2007).

This last point – that it is impossible to collect every shred of evidence – points to the third standard suggested by Marc Trachtenburg: how the availability of evidence can truncate or distort one’s causal inferences. Ultimately, an evaluation of the absence (or sufficiency) of evidence is a practical kind of knowledge, not a theoretical judgment. The researcher must make decisions about if and when they have enough reliable data to generate plausible explanations for the political phenomena in question. There are always constraints to evidentiary access, not least of which is limited resources. Yet evidence can also be unavailable because key decisions were made privately or in camera, or because potential respondents are unwilling or unable to be interviewed. Two strategies guided my decisions for knowing when to stop gathering data: consultation with local experts and ‘saturation’. Regarding the former, informal discussions with experts and academics immersed in French and German education policy yielded important advice on which archives or primary documents were accessible, which potential respondents were likely to grant interviews, and where other sources of data might be available. Regarding the latter, evidence was gathered until the point of saturation, when adding new streams of

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32 This is not a check of reliability, but it does allow the researcher to assess the representativeness of a given actor compared across the same category of elites.
evidence or lines of questioning no longer yielded new information. Guided by the evidentiary standards above, and utilizing the current best practices of process tracing, I was able to draw robust inferences about the causal processes in each case.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I proposed a set of interrelated arguments regarding the relationship between institutions of policy design and forms of policy change, for insulated sectors under acute external pressure. Given these conditions, we must re-conceptualize policy change to better account for intermediate forms of change, such as re-instrumentation, which embed innovative means for governance or implementation into an existing framework of policy aims and objectives. Such attempts to control reform during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium can be explained vis-à-vis subsystem politics. The degree to which a managed reform was successful depended on the properties of the policy subsystem. A policy oligopoly – in which members shared political if not policy goals – greatly increased the likelihood of a significant change in the instrumental logic of education policy.

These arguments suggest that we should refine our understanding of policy internationalization and the domestic factors constraining policy change. Rather than continue to assume that partisan ideologies and/or a diffusion of ideas are the factors which drive policy change, and that macro-political institutions resist this change, we must examine the actual causal pathways that lead from policy design to policy inception. A close and comparative analysis of two cases with unexpected policy change outcomes reveals that much variance can be explained by the distinct properties and features of sector-specific subsystems. Under the right conditions, subsystem types can determine forms of policy change during punctuations in the policy equilibrium when the status quo has been disrupted and challenged. Institutions and institutional arrangements might be more important for change outcomes than

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33 “That is, a researcher should stop pursuing any one stream of evidence when it becomes so repetitive that gathering more of that same kind of evidence has a low probability of revising their estimate of the likely accuracy of alternative explanations” (Checkel and Bennett 2014, 28).
currently anticipated by existing theories of policy-making. Institutions at the meso-level can sustain the status quo and guide national processes of policy change (and internationalization), more so than variables at the macro-political level.

1.6.1 Dissertation Roadmap

The rest of this dissertation unfolds as follows. In Chapter Two, I develop a theoretical framework which connects subsystemic institutional structures to a significant change of instrumental logic (given particular scope conditions). In so doing, I define key concepts such as change to instrumentation, subsystemic politics, and policy oligopolies, and then present a model of agenda-management which explains managed and mismanaged reforms during punctuations to policy equilibria. This chapter develops causal propositions for the agenda-management model, proposes alternative explanations for the cases analyzed here, and generates measurable indicators to test the plausibility of each explanation. Chapters Three and Four operationalize the model for the two cases under analysis: Germany and then France. Each chapter provides historical and institutional context for the case in question, describes the pattern of policy change, and explains the emergence of particular forms of policy subsystem. These case chapters then establish evidence for the type of policy design institution during the punctuation in the policy equilibria, analyzes the effects of said subsystem, and compares this account to alternative theories. Carefully tracing the causal pathways and mechanisms of policy-making, and testing propositions from each plausible explanation, allow me to draw conclusions about each case. In the final chapter, I summarize the dissertation, compare accounts of policy change, and draw conclusions about the veracity of an agenda-management model of policy change. In the concluding chapter, I also turn to questions of generalization and external validity, re-specifying relevant scope conditions and reviewing theoretical contributions. To conclude the dissertation, I suggest ways in which the model can be further corroborated as well as extended to other country cases and policy areas.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework for an Agenda-management Model of Policy Change

2.1 Introduction: Subsystem Politics and Education Reform

This chapter presents a theoretical framework for the comparative study of policy change in ‘insulated’ policy regimes, during a period of intensive demands and pressures generated by globalization. The phenomena to be explained is why, under certain conditions, some countries could significantly change instruments of educational governance and evaluation, while others could not. In Section Two, this question is framed in terms of the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework (PEF) and compares the conventional agenda-setting model to the proposed agenda-management model. The latter argues that there are alternative patterns of policy-making during punctuations in policy equilibria, and that these lead to more intermediate change outcomes which are not yet well-theorized by the PEF. Section Three picks up the argument by providing more nuanced descriptions of policy change, and re-conceptualizing a form of change which accounts for both policy continuity and reform: a significant change in instrumental logic. In the fourth section, I argue that institutions of policy design are the key variable for understanding ‘re-instrumentation’ during punctuations in education policy equilibria. One particular form of subsystem (and a novel concept introduced in this dissertation) is a policy oligopoly. An oligopoly is a stable form of subsystem that can manage agendas during periods of policy instability, by defining problems as technical, and solutions as instrumental and manageable back in the subsystem. In Section Five, I argue that the mechanisms by which subsystem politics get translated into managed reforms is vis-à-vis the framing of policy issues and the control of policy development venues. Framing and venue-control are stabilizing strategies used by subsystem actors, as well as stabilizing mechanisms induced by the institutional field of subsystem politics. Section Six lays out the model’s theoretical propositions. For cases where an agenda-management model pertains, the existence of a policy oligopoly is sufficient not only to secure a greater likelihood for significant change
in the instrumental logic of policy, but also explains the persistence of the subsystem itself during punctuation in policy equilibria. In Section Seven, I posit the scope conditions that pertain to an agenda-management model, and discuss why the political, policy and historical contexts of each case establish common antecedent conditions, yet also unique status quos. In Section Eight, I suggest that ‘meso-level’ institutions were more determinate for the forms of policy change seen in these cases, than plausible alternative explanations such as policy internationalization driven by ideational diffusion, or change driven by party politics and electoral interests. I conclude in the final section by arguing for the plausibility of an agenda-management model and the implications this model has for a Punctuated Equilibrium Framework. Finally, I suggest that we reconsider the power of the status quo, and how it affects the relationship between subsystem politics and policy change.

2.2 An Agenda-management Model within a Punctuated Equilibrium Framework

An agenda-management model of education policy change builds on the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework (PEF), an analytical approach to the policy process that can account for both policy stability and policy change (Baumgartner and Jones 1991, 1993, 2002, 2009; Baumgartner, Jones, and Mortensen 2014; Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Amongst the major theoretical approaches for the making of public policy, PEF is most useful for three reasons. First, it can describe the dependent variable in terms of degrees of change (i.e., as a variance between one status quo to another), whereas Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) and the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) place greater emphasis on the timing or content of policy change. Second, PEF tries to systematically account for why disruptive reform episodes occur, vis-à-vis selective attention and exogenous shocks. MSA and ACF do not proffer a systematic (cross-case) means for understanding the dynamics of the ‘why now’ question, because this question gets answered idiosyncratically and within-case (vis-à-vis windows of opportunity or moments of coalition formation). Finally, PEF incorporates attentional dynamics into a framework for understanding how change occurs. While agendas matter for other approaches, how they matter is comparatively
under-theorized. PEF is an appropriate approach for tackling these specific research questions, for the particular dynamics in each case, and to permit systematic cross-case comparison.

However, the above does not suggest that an agenda-management model is simply a stage within the ‘standard’ PEF model of policy change. Instead, agenda-management is an alternative pathway in PEF, leading to different policy outcomes. In short, the conventional agenda-setting model prevails where agenda-management fails. Key aspects of PEF shape both models: punctuated policy equilibria; the importance of agendas (and selective attention); the critical role played by institutions; and similarities in the mechanisms of change. However, due to the scope conditions relevant for an agenda-management model, some of the dynamics of the ‘standard’ agenda-setting model must be altered. The former describes less disruptive policy change, and explains this change using different patterns of policy-making. Relative to agenda-setting, the agenda-management model predicts agendas which are set ‘externally’ yet managed ‘internally’, attention within issues (not just across them), the influence of institutions beyond the macro-political, and causal mechanisms which stabilize policy as well as change it. In the section below, I briefly review the ‘standard’ model of agenda-setting in the PEF, before highlighting key amendments for an agenda-management model.

2.2.1 The Standard Model: Agenda-setting and Disruptive Policy Change

The agenda-setting model suggests that an especially prominent (though not exclusive) pattern of policy change involves long periods of stability interspersed with brief and relatively unpredictable periods of transformation, during which the attention of macro-political actors has been drawn to a policy area. The outcomes predicted by this model were exemplified by postwar US nuclear policy: decades of policy stability before (and after) a brief yet highly disruptive period of change that transformed the orientation, aims and governance of nuclear policy. This punctuation in the policy equilibrium was triggered by the accident at Three Mile Island in 1979, which captured the attention of high-level decision-makers in government. Models in the PEF argue that agendas are critical: those who can draw
government attention to issues can also affect policy change. For agenda-setting, drawing attention to a policy area occurs via two mechanisms: framing and venue-shopping. Framing refers to how an issue or problem is defined. Positive framing suggests that a policy area is well-managed, with problems that are insignificant or well-managed. A negative image of crisis or failure is a call for widespread attention and immediate action, leading to repudiation of the status quo and transformation of a policy area. Venue refers to where policies are discussed. Framing issues in different ways allows actors to move policy discussions to venues more favourable for the realization of their preferences. Much of the time, policies remain stable because positive framing and venue-control keeps issues out of the spotlight. This is what a policy monopoly does: it conveys a positive image of the policy area, reduces attention and conflict, and restricts venues for policy discussion and development (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 2009; Baumgartner, Jones, and Mortensen 2014). However, monopolies are not invulnerable forever. In an agenda-setting model, framing and venue-shopping are causal mechanisms which drive policy change and undermine monopolies, as high-level decision-makers react to information which can induce them to transform policies and select new policy designers. The key institutions (and actors) for this model are in the macro-political sphere (i.e., the ‘high’ executive, legislatures, and judiciaries), although these types of actors are also responsive to issue-attention in the public sphere (i.e., public opinion and media coverage). In sum, policy change has a punctuated dynamic because policy areas move in and out of the public and macro-political spotlight. Patterns of policy change are determined by the selective attention of high-level decision-makers in government.

2.2.2 An Agenda-management Model of Policy Change

An agenda-management model suggests that some of the dynamics above are altered when reform agendas are the result of ‘external’ pressure (such as globalization effects), when a policy sector is well-insulated by the state, and when the political effects of policy change are ambiguous. These conditions shift the patterns and processes within PEF, such that reforms are less disruptive, and so that different
types of institutions begin to play a more prominent role for driving and constraining change. For one, policy change need not be disruptive nor transformative even during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium. The agenda-management model examines cases where there were attempts to significantly change the logic of instrumentation during a punctuation, policy goals notwithstanding. Second, the model assumes that the reform agenda is set by actors not in the policy sector itself: bureaucrats and implementers within the policy area react to an agenda set by others, and try to manage it. Third, these actors then attempt to draw attention to particular aspects within the problem, allowing them to gain or retain political control over future policy design. Framing and venue-control thus become strategies (and mechanisms) not only for change, but also for preserving the status quo. As such, certain subsystem-types (like oligopolies) will have a greater capacity to frame problems as technical and solutions as instrumental, with implementation best managed back in the subsystem. Other subsystem-types will present a conflicted interpretation of the issues, with subsystem actors ‘shopping’ their policy image in different venues to either affect greater change or block reform altogether (depending on their preferences). In the case of the latter dynamic, agenda-management effectively reverts to agenda-setting; institutions and actors in the macro-political sphere again become the agents, determining forms of policy change (if any). I argue in this dissertation that significant changes to instrumental logic are determined by stable subsystems (in the cases here, by an oligopoly). Oligopolies do this by framing issues as manageable, and keeping policy design discussions – if not all forms of debate – out of the macro-political and public spheres.

2.3 Patterns of Policy Change within a Punctuated Equilibrium Framework (PEF)

In many respects, “all policy is policy change” (Hogwood and Peters 1983, 25). A primary purpose of government is to solve societal problems and affect change in areas where human intervention is

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34 The agenda-setting model does not specify particular characteristics for events that trigger punctuations.
possible and desirable, and this is accomplished via public policy. However, there is seldom a straightforward relationship between the emergence of societal problems and the political response to them, because the timing and form of public policy seldom correlates neatly with the emergence of problems. As such, longitudinal analyses reveal a ‘leptokurtic’ pattern to policy change: reforms are unevenly distributed, involving stable periods with incremental adjustment to the policy status quo, interspersed with short bursts of profound change (Baumgartner 2013; Jones and Baumgartner 2005, 111). These dynamics are captured in the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework (PEF). Education policy changes during the 2000s were largely consistent with the ‘disruptive dynamics’ described by PEF, although in the cases examined here, elements of policy change are in need of further elaboration.

Defining change has been a perennial issue for comparative public policy. Much like the dependent variable problem found in literature on welfare state retrenchment, analysts of policy change have often been more adept at conceptualizing explanatory factors than carefully describing outcomes of interest (Howlett and Cashore 2009, see also Green-Pedersen 2004). The current orthodoxy for describing policy change is based on the seminal work of Peter A. Hall (1989, 1993). Hall conceived of three orders of policy change: first order change in policy settings, second order change in policy instruments and settings, and third order change in policy goals, instruments and settings (also called paradigm shift because it establishes a qualitatively different kind of policy framework). In this reckoning, first and second order change involved incremental adjustments to the status quo, whereas third order change established a new status quo. Conceptualizing policy change in terms of degrees

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35 Leptokurtic refers to a type of distribution (in this case, policy change) which is characterized by high and sharp ‘peaks’ (where dramatic change occurs) and ‘fat tails’ outside the mean (in other words, little or no change much of the time).

36 “Paul Pierson argued that ‘it is difficult to exaggerate’ the obstacle the continued dissensus over the definition, operationalization and measurement of policy change creates for comparative research and theory construction on policy dynamics” (Howlett and Migone 2011, 59; see also Pierson 2001).

37 Hall’s ‘new orthodoxy’ was a response to long-standing debates and misunderstandings over what constitutes policy change. In the tradition of Lindblom (1959) and Heclo (1974), incremental policy change long meant minor adjustments that reinforced the status quo. Hall’s model – and indeed the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework – sought to explain other types of policy change, and draw distinctions between incremental adjustment and
(orders) is problematic because it is difficult to operationalize, and less clear about significant forms of change that do not entail total repudiation of the status quo and re-orientation of a policy area. One response has been to collapse all three dimensions into a single variable: change or no change (Baumgartner 2013). This might be helpful for comparing policies with highly commensurable units of measurement (such as education budgets), but less so for policies with qualitative differences, such as modes of governance. Another approach makes a distinction between orders and types of change (Cashore and Howlett 2007; Howlett and Cashore 2009). This suggests that there can be significant (though not paradigmatic) changes to policy, such as reform of governance or evaluation policies, which meaningfully alter the status quo without upending it. A profound change to the means of achieving abstract policy aims is transformative, even if the goals of a policy area remain substantially the same.

2.3.1 Forms of Policy Change

I argue that we must adopt change in instrumental logic as a qualitatively distinct dependent variable, to accommodate a broader range of empirical phenomena. Howlett and Cashore (2007; 2009) have begun to develop a typology of policy change, in which six types of change are discernible. Policy change can vary according to content (i.e., as a degree of change at different levels of abstraction, much like Hall’s framework) and in terms of focus (change oriented either to goals, or to the means of implementing those goals). The finer details of this typology are not important for the cases here, except to say there is one form of change that can be quite significant yet need not repudiate the policy status quo. This is a profound policy change. However, there remains much ambiguity surrounding the relationship between paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic types of change, because it is not clear under what circumstances anomalies are just anomalies (with a policy response that re-adjusts back to the existing status quo) and what circumstances anomalies are sufficiently large or cumulative to discredit the status quo and engender a paradigm shift. Now, the idea of ‘policy adjustment’ is itself being reconsidered, perhaps inspired by the gradual transformation models of institutional change (Streeck and Thelen 2005; Thelen 2003). There has been the realization that ‘incrementalism’ was long used as an umbrella term for a number of quite different types of concepts and policy dynamics, which require extensive disambiguation (Cashore and Howlett 2007; Howlett and Migone 2011; Rothmayr Allison and Saint-Martin 2011).

In relation to the current orthodoxy, the dependent variable described here is not so much a degree of policy change as a form of change (i.e., it is like second order change in that it pertains to instruments, but also shares a characteristic feature of third order change in that it involves changes to the logic which undergirds policy).
change in the logic of policy instruments, such that the norms and cognitive theories which guide policy implementation are transformed, while the abstract aims for a policy area remain the same. Clearly, this represents a significant form of policy change – it requires a high level of abstraction, and results in further changes to specific mechanisms, techniques, or tools (and calibrations thereof). However, it is not totally disruptive either, because actors can use new instruments – which function according to a coherent logic – to achieve their original goals (be that equity, excellence, high expenditure, differentiated schooling, and so on). Public policy instruments, as understood here, are the object of analysis inasmuch as I am explaining a particular form of policy change rather than specific policy content. Here, the point is to understand why there was successful change in instrumental logic for one case, and not the other. In the discussion below, I draw on the work of Howlett and Cashore (2007; 2009) and Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007) to conceptualize significant and sustained change to the logic of policy instruments.

2.3.2 The Logic of Public Policy Instruments

An instrumental logic in public policy has conceptual coherence: it is a mechanism of governance or implementation that can both monitor and steer a social system, “a device that is both technical and social” (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, 4). As a technical device, it operates according to a logic of

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39 At least over the short-to-medium term. The long-term implications of a change to instrumental logic are not analysed in this dissertation. However, ‘instrumentation’ has been the subject of considerable analysis amongst public policy scholars, and evaluations of instruments as an independent variable demonstrates their powerful transformative effects (Hood 2007). For example, the ‘political sociology of instruments’ (also called the ‘institutions-as-instruments’ approach) has demonstrated that instruments have significant downstream effects on a policy area. An instrument creates a specific representation of an issue by problematizing (and privileging) particular aspects. Once enacted and established, instruments can also induce inertia and path dependence (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, 10–11).

40 Much of the research on instrumentation as a dependent variable has examined instrument choice, with instruments either as functional responses to political or economic requirements (Dahl and Lindblom 1953; Foucault 1977; Hood 1983; Scott 1998), as simply the implementation aspect within broader policy schema (Lowi 1972; Wilson 1980), or as the specific choices of actors engaged in cognitive or political processes (Linder and Peters 1989, 1992, 1998). How actors learn about or choose between instruments is an important question, but not one that I theorize here. Rather, I ask why instruments have been selected as a mode of change from amongst (or within) other forms of policy reform, and under what circumstances changes to instrumental logic are successful.
consequences, based on an implicit theory about cause and effect, and demanding certain forms of intervention when cause-and-effect relationships have been impeded. For education, this refers to measurement and assessment of the functionality of an education system, based on cognitive models (or mere assumptions) about the causal relationship between inputs (resources, individual intelligence, contact time, and so on), and outputs (credentials, grades, competences, rankings, etc.). As a device that organizes social relations, instruments also have a logic of appropriateness; they refer to a mode of governance which indicates the role of the state and influences the behaviour of stakeholders in a given policy area. For education, this means the quality assurance tools used to steer an education system towards its goals. Specific instruments cohere around a core logic regarding these relationships between cause and effect, and between the governors and the governed. Instrument ‘mixes’ are certainly possible (and often the norm), and this can entail the co-existence of specific mechanisms and calibrations at the operational level (Howlett and Cashore 2009). However, each ideal-typical instrument is undergirded by a dominant logic, and re-instrumentation occurs when this instrumental logic changes. Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007) discuss five instrumental logics: ‘regulatory’; ‘economic’; ‘agreement-based’; ‘communication-based’; and ‘standards-based’. I explain and operationalize the different types of instrumental logic below, but to give a preliminary indication of where change is expected to occur: it is a sustained transition from the traditional ‘command-and-control’ logic of regulatory instruments, to one of the newer instrumental logics of public policy – even though the specific choice of new instrument can vary.

2.3.1.1 Technical and Social Dimensions of Traditional Policy Instruments

Regulatory and economic instruments are the traditional policy levers of the bureaucratic state. For public education systems in Western Europe, a regulatory logic prevailed for well over a century.41 This

41 Some economic tools have been incorporated into the instrument-mix, but an economic logic of financial ‘sticks and carrots’ is generally ill-suited to the public investment paradigm of post-war French and German education (i.e., tax incentives are meaningless, ‘performance pay’ is anathema to le service public, and so on). Economic
logic assumes that the state can establish what is in the national or public interest, detect circumstances when that interest is not served, and directly intervene to compel actors to change behaviour via legal sanction. Regulatory instruments mandate the parameters for social behaviour, and derive legitimacy for such imposition by being representative of the general interest – sometimes accompanied by legislation from elected representatives. Operationally, regulatory instruments compel behaviour in the education system by focussing on inputs – the only aspect that the state can fully control. The government can measure and monitor outputs (and even ‘mandate’ certain objectives be met), but a regulatory logic is input-oriented because it asserts that positive outcomes are generated vis-à-vis the direct control of educational inputs, such as curriculum, resources, student-teacher ratios, and so on. A regulatory instrumental logic has been operating in Western European education since the secular state consolidated control over public education in the nineteenth century, wresting control away from church officials or local actors.

2.3.1.2 Technical and Social Dimensions of New Policy Instruments

This traditional regulatory logic stands in contrast to the new public policy instruments being introduced to many areas of public policy. Newer public policy instruments derive their force and legitimacy from less hierarchical relationships between the state and civil society, and are ‘output-oriented’ inasmuch as evaluators monitor outputs closely in order to govern by them. Rather than output ‘control’, one could think of these instrumental logics as being about output orientation, steering or accountability. Governments still adjust inputs, but they do so without trying to tightly control – or sometimes even understand – the processes that lead from the inputs they can dictate to the outputs they desire. There are three types of new instrumental logics: communication-based, agreement-based, and standards-based (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007). In some policy sectors these instruments overlap, yet they instruments and market mechanisms seem to be more prevalent in liberal market economies like the USA, vis-à-vis school vouchers, privatization, and so on (Hannaway and Woodroffe 2003).
function according to distinct logics. I deal with agreement-based and standards-based instrumental logics below, as they are most relevant for the cases under analysis.42

An agreement-based instrumental logic functions according to a quasi-market rationale, perhaps most often associated with ‘New Public Management’.43 Rather than having the state prescribe objectives and intervene in order to achieve them, this logic assumes that societal actors can establish their own objectives and solve their own dilemmas, and can thus commit to contractual agreements established with state authorities. Agreement-based instruments are legitimized by directly involving civil society actors in their own governance. The logic here is that the interventionist state gives way to a more mobilizing state, using contractual agreements that allow actors to formulate their own (narrow) objectives and/or incentives. Operationally, this means policies which establish contractual relationships between the state and civil society, or between levels of administration. These contracts are ‘output-oriented’ in that schools (or teachers, or delinquent students, etc.) must establish their own objectives (and sometimes also the incentives for reaching them) within the parameters of general educational aims established by the state.

A standards-based instrumental logic functions according to a technocratic rationale, which assumes that there are evidence-based or scientific means for determining problems and their solutions.

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42 A communication-based logic is a new public policy instrument not elaborated here. Communication-based instruments foster information-sharing between stakeholders and evaluators, with a logic that precludes the need for direct state interventions using a dynamic of ‘naming-and-shaming’, in that the provision of information about progress or problems can shame actors into better problem-solving or goal-seeking behaviour. There were communication-based tools and techniques introduced to French and German education, but they were not the dominant logic for quality assurance of compulsory education.

43 There is some debate over the degree to which all new public policy instruments are manifestations of ‘New Public Management’ (NPM) or ‘the new managerialism’. Broad definitions of NPM have included “the insertion of business management techniques into the management of public sector institutions” (Stone 2001, 26), as well as simply referring to it as ‘the principal-agent movement’ (OECD 2001, 54). Among educationists, the new managerialism includes any efficiency or output-related reforms emerging from a culture of corporate consultancy; things like ‘customer care’, over-emphasis on quality and excellence, ‘high trust’ forms of employee control, and new forms of surveillance like standards or comparisons (Apple 2001, 410; Ball 1998, 123; Lundgren 2011, 21; Morgan 2011, 49–50). Instruments which operationalize the latter (standards; new forms of surveillance) are not predominantly agreement-based, but rather, adhere to other logics of instrumentation.
in a given policy area. Standards-based instruments have mixed legitimacy: partly based on scientific rationality (helping to de-politicize the issue) and partly based on deliberation, negotiation and cooperation. Their force derives from the moral suasion of ‘rational’ and ‘negotiated’ legitimacy, often combined with mechanisms of competition (such as benchmarking). The appearance of a standard is not itself a clear operationalization of a standards-based instrumental logic, because states have long used standards as ‘tools of legibility’ to create categories and thus conformity in society (Scott 1998, 25). As a new public policy instrument, educational standards involve more than just a category of achievement. Standard-setting is about accountability and benchmarking, enforced not by state-selected (and typically rather arbitrary) criteria but instead by actors from ‘outside the state’, such as technical experts or international benchmarks. Stakeholders also become involved in standard-setting, as there is often some implicit or explicit agreement among state and civil society actors regarding how to set standards which are fair and reasonable (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007).

The different instrumental logics are discernible in concrete formal policies because each encompasses an implicit theory of cause and effect (a technical dimension) as well as norms regarding appropriate governance in that policy area (a social dimension). Although ‘contractual’ and ‘technocratic’ logics are based on abstract cognitive schemata about causality and social relations, they are relatively clear in policy documents because instruments must be oriented towards practical action by the state and/or societal actors.

2.3.3 Education as a Policy Area: The Importance of Evaluation Policy

During this period, the key transformations in instrumental logics occurred in evaluation policy, one of the core structural features of an education system. Evaluation policies define, measure and enforce ‘quality assurance’, however quality as such is defined. Evaluation policies are means-oriented policies about governance, distinct from many of the other structural features of education systems which are
Because evaluation policy is oriented to means and not ends, it is a sector-specific example of an instrumental logic that can change independently of educational aims. If significant and sustained, a change in evaluation policy is both destabilizing and re-stabilizing; it changes the status quo, yet also bridges elements of the prevailing status quo to a new logic of action. Education evaluation is an area of public policy for which we can analyze the causes for instrumentation and reconsider the distinctions between policy transformation and the politics of ‘muddling through’.

During the 2000s, changes to evaluation policy in Germany were significant compared to France. From late 2001, policies of educational evaluation changed from regulatory to standards-based in Germany, with a transition to an output-oriented quality assurance framework which empowered subsystem actors to set and maintain national standards. This involved a significant yet stable change in the logic of evaluation, which could also be integrated into the prevailing status quo of goals, educational structures, and financing. Attempts to transform French education after 2007 were less successful. New instruments for evaluation and governance (i.e., ‘contractualization’) were presented within an omnibus of reforms, and most of the reforms – including the new instrumental logic – were revoked by the President when discussions over policy design began to resemble a street brawl. After a new consultation process, a number of more incremental policy changes were initiated, mainly in areas

Comparative educationists distinguish between the core structural features of education systems, classifying them into seven different dimensions: ‘provision’; ‘public investment’; ‘vocational training’; ‘access’; ‘stratification’; ‘centralization’; and ‘evaluation’ (Brauns, Müller, and Steinmann 1997; Busemeyer and Nikolai 2010; Hopper 1968; Witte 2006). The first five could be deemed ‘programmatic’ features of education because they orient a system towards particular aims (typically via the introduction of policy programs). These features often invoke the ideological preferences of actors in the field of education because they have significant distributive or redistributive consequences. The last two are ‘governance’ features – they do not define the broader aims of education, nor necessarily invoke ideological preferences. Governance dimensions oversee the ways in which goals and objectives are to be met (whatever those might be) and which levels of government are ultimately responsible for achieving them. Because educational jurisdictions were largely settled in Western Europe by the mid-twentieth century, there have been limited opportunities for change in political centralization. Administrative centralization is a different matter, as this pertains more to the operation of schools than it does regulation or provision (see Hurrelmann et al. 2009). Here, there have been adjustments over the last three decades, especially in France since 1982 (more on this in the chapter on France). However, it has been the final dimension of educational structure, ‘evaluation’, which has been the site of much debate and policy change, as countries reconsider their systems of educational quality assurance.
other than evaluation. The greater complexity of this ‘obstructed reform’ scenario is not fully theorized here, yet juxtaposing it to the managed reform scenario provides insight into which variables are critical for explaining the power of the status quo. In other words, what was it about the status quo in each of these cases that led to a significant yet stable change where it was unexpected, and unsuccessful reform where it seemed most possible? Both cases describe attempts to change the logic of policy instruments during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium – only one of which was ultimately successful.

2.4 Subsystem Politics and a Policy Oligopoly

There is a broad range of organizations and actors which can influence policy, and they operate within particular institutional settings and according to certain rules and norms. A policy subsystem is one such institutional setting with the capacity to shape education reform, even when final policy decisions are ultimately made by others. Policy subsystems and subsystem politics are general terms that refer to institutionalized group-government relations. A subsystem is a cluster of actors from among elected government, the permanent bureaucracy, and representatives of ‘policy users’, who specialize in specific issue areas, make routine decisions, and implement policies on a day-to-day basis. Without suggesting that form follows function, there are logical reasons why subsystems develop. From the perspective of ‘generalist’ decision-makers at the macro-political level, subsystems are institutions that can facilitate parallel processing of specialized information, and reduce uncertainty regarding the implementation of policy decisions (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 44). For their part, non-governmental actors also have an interest in creating or sustaining subsystems: “Every interest, every group, every policy entrepreneur has a primary interest in establishing a monopoly – a monopoly on political understandings concerning the policy of interest, and an institutional arrangement that reinforces that understanding” (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 6). The conceptualization of subsystem politics was
developed “to show that ‘real’ politics was not parliament-centred” (Jordan 2005, 317).\footnote{A similar concept has been used in British politics, a ‘policy community’, as part of an effort to reorient policy analysis towards insulated and sectoral group-government relations, and away from formal political institutions and procedures like electoral systems or the parliamentary process (Richardson and Jordan 1979). Terms such as ‘policy community’, ‘policy network’, ‘issue network’, ‘iron triangle’, ‘policy whirlpool’, or ‘corporate pluralism’ have distinct meanings based on particular ontologies or specific political settings (a literature bifurcated between analyses of the USA and the UK, with more some analyses of the EU). The British ‘Anglo-governance’ school (pertaining also to Australia and Canada as empirical cases) has preferred the terms ‘policy community’ and ‘policy network’ in order to emphasize that these relationships are based on exchange, often using methods that analyze the flow of different kinds of resources across networks (Marsh 2011; Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Marsh, Richards, and Smith 2003; Rhodes 1990, 1996, Richardson 1982, 2000; Richardson and Jordan 1979). In the USA, the terms ‘policy subsystem’, ‘sub-government’, or ‘policy monopoly’ are more frequently used, typically emphasizing relationships based on institutional position or coalitional power (Baumgartner and Jones 1991; Heclo 1978; Jordan 1990; Jordan and Maloney 1997; Ripley and Franklin 1984; Sabatier 1988, 1993). Notwithstanding the proliferation of concepts and terms related to sectoral relationships between government and pressure participants, I use the terminology found in the literature in the US: subsystems and ‘policy monopolies’.} Parliamentary and congressional politics do matter for public policy, but politicians can be quickly overwhelmed under conditions of high pressure and high uncertainty, making subsystems more relevant. Subsystems that are inclusive, coherent, and stable can manage the reform agenda in macro-political arenas, and they do this by influencing policy deliberation during punctuations in policy equilibria.

The capacity of a subsystem to induce a change in instrumentation depends on their institutional properties. Drawing on accounts of policy communities and subsystems, I define the three major properties of subsystems as 1) a bounded and defined structure, 2) a shared image (or interpretation) of the policy area, and 3) stability, as determined by the norms and procedures for communication and conflict management (Cairney 2013; Grant 2005; Jordan 1990, 2005; Jordan and Cairney 2013; Jordan, Halpin, and Maloney 2004; Jordan and Maloney 1997; Richardson 2000; Richardson and Jordan 1979). As dimensions of a subsystem that co-vary together, these properties are not independent variables in their own right. Rather, they are indicators of the existence and type of policy subsystem. Below, I elaborate on these properties for subsystems in general, before discussing which values indicate a policy oligopoly.
2.4.1 Properties of Policy Subsystems

The first property, structure, refers to the finite and defined membership of a policy community. This membership structure restricts access to certain types of actors in order to try and build a shared institutional culture, and a consensus around policy design. There are three types of actors involved in a subsystem: elected government, state experts, and a bounded set of ‘pressure participants.’

Government actors are those elected members of the government and their political appointees who focus on educational issues: Ministers and/or their advisors (including state secretaries, deputy ministers, ministerial cabinets, and other special advisors). This category of actor is vital, yet often transient. State experts are typically (but not always) part of the permanent bureaucracy, spending longer periods of time evaluating issues in a policy area and often deriving authority from their technical training or experience. For some subsystems, the state has ‘outsourced’ this expertise to researchers operating in civil society, but these actors are still expected to report to the state in some official capacity (rather than unofficially, as éminences grises). Each ministry segments its bureaucracy differently, and subsystems reflect departmental divisions by including only those state experts and officials who are relevant (and sometimes those who are particularly influential). Pressure participants are ‘users’ of policy.46 For some sectors these actors can be from the private sphere, but in a public sector like education, pressure participants have traditionally been corporate actors such as

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46 ‘Pressure participants’ is a term adopted by policy community scholars to get away from the term ‘interest group’, which can be misleading because it presents an image of organizations that lobby the government solely on behalf of narrow self-interest. Pressure participant denotes a wider range of organizations directly affected by policy, whose interests in the policy area can be simultaneously narrow, such as material benefit, and broad, such as concern about how to improve general performance (Cairney 2013; Jordan, Halpin, and Maloney 2004). Disentangling the motivations of these actors is a challenge for the government (and for researchers) because they often present their narrow interests as part of the common good. In the context of a national policy community, pressure participants are identifiable by what they do (i.e., they use an ‘inside strategy’ to influence decision-makers) and not who they are (i.e., their interests or motivations). In pluralist regimes or sectors with many private actors, pressure participants are effectively lobbyists. In neo-corporatist regimes and predominantly public sectors, pressure participants might include associations of employers or employees, trade unions, or associations representing policy users or policy implementers. The key distinction for the cases here is that pressure participants do not lobby government, they are consulted by government.
representatives of teachers’ or parents’ groups. Some pressure participants – teacher representatives, for example – function as a kind of ‘expert in implementation’, and thus there can be tension between them and state experts regarding authoritative knowledge for policy design.\(^{47}\) Subsystem membership should be clearly articulated, with rules or norms that delineate the boundaries of the community as well as jurisdictions within the subsystem over relevant decision areas. Well-defined membership criteria do not infer a well-defined membership; rules and norms can be explicit about which kinds of organizations are involved, without specifying precisely which organizations are involved.\(^{48}\) As a property of subsystems, structure can vary on a continuum from inclusive to exclusionary. All subsystems must exclude a large number of actors, or else the cacophony of voices would make policy design impossible. Some subsystems will have very narrow structure and finite membership, while others will try to incorporate more actors affected by policy choices.

The second property, a shared image of the policy area, refers to the ways that subsystem actors interpret issues and problems. Subsystems try to establish and transmit a ‘monopoly of understanding’ regarding interpretations of a public area. Image is an existential property: “[a subsystem] exists where there are effective shared ‘community’ views on the problem. Where there are no such shared views no community exists.” (Jordan 1990, 327. Emphasis in the original). Policy image does not mean that actors must also share fundamental interests or policy aims; a subsystem is united by a paradigmatic understanding of the issues, not homogenous beliefs or preferences. A subsystem

\(^{47}\) The increasing prevalence of new ‘state’ experts has put strain on traditional subsystem relationships, and resulted in some institutional change. The relationship between institutional change and policy change is not theorized in this dissertation, although briefly discussed in the concluding chapter.

\(^{48}\) Policy subsystems are not impermeable structures with closed memberships. Jordan (2005, 318) defends the ‘conspicuous practice’ of policy community authors failing to provide definitive membership lists because communities shift between sectors and over time. The rules and norms are stable even if the actors are not, and too much emphasis on structure misses the process. “[There is] a danger of adopting too rigid a view of networks, so that such phrases as ‘relatively closed’ become synonymous with ‘totally impervious to outside forces’. No network is ever wholly closed” (Marsh and Rhodes 1992, 259). In other words, it is the policy world that is vague, not the concept of a policy subsystem or policy community.
that is able to convey a cohesive and coherent image – even if the full implications of particular policy designs are not altogether clear – is likely to instill greater confidence in decision-makers. For example, a shared interpretation of issues which involves the acknowledgement of problems that are under control will promote the continued stewardship of the policy area by subsystem actors. Finally, image is a critical property for distinguishing between types of subsystems. Some subsystems understand issues in terms of shared aims and problem definitions (and are not always able to come to agreement on appropriate solutions when designing policy). I refer to these as policy monopolies. Other subsystems understand issues in terms of solutions, with (limited) internal competition regarding how problems are defined. These are policy oligopolies, and they have the capacity to design policies that are means-based rather than goal- or norm-oriented. In short, actors in oligopolies need not reach consensus on broad policy aims to come to some agreement over workable solutions, forming a kind of ‘instrument constituency’. Along with structure, image distinguishes between subsystem types, yet does not determine the success of agenda management.

The final property, stability, is critical for enabling subsystem influence over a reform agenda during a policy punctuation. Unstable subsystems can produce rather than reduce uncertainty, such that decision-makers are less likely to heed subsystem advice regarding policy design. Subsystems have institutionalized procedures for managing internal conflict, as well as insulating them from other policy sectors, the public, and overt partisanship. A subsystem need not be secretive to be insulated, indeed they might consult with actors from outside the policy community in order to gauge others’ interpretations and implementation preferences. Yet the subsystem will try to sequester themselves from outside interference as they interpret problems and develop a particular policy design. In so doing, they also attempt to manage conflict within the community in order that the issue can be depoliticized in other venues. Thus, extra-community communication tends to be consultative, whereas intra-community communication tends to be deliberative. Yet too much emphasis on managing internal
conflict can also come at a cost, in terms of flexibility and inclusion. If the only method to stabilize a subsystem is to exclude all dissenting views, then the subsystem runs the risk of being challenged (and destabilized) from the outside. In this way, stability interacts and co-varies with the other properties: subsystems can be internally destabilized if too inclusive because the policy image becomes incoherent, yet subsystems that are too exclusionary, with a policy image unrepresentative of the sector, can be destabilized by excluded actors. For the latter, excluded actors perceived as legitimate or authoritative for the policy design process can have greater success challenging a subsystem’s membership and interpretations. Unlike structure or image, stability does not define subsystem-type, but monopolies tend to encounter problems with excluded actors, while oligopolies typically contend with internal stability issues. All three properties together are instrumental for determining subsystemic influence in the macro-political arena during a policy punctuation.

2.4.2 Defining a Policy Oligopoly

The conceptual roots of a policy oligopoly were borne out of Baumgartner and Jones’s notion of a policy monopoly. Monopolies remain influential by mitigating adversarial relationships between their members, as well as avoiding attention from outside the community; the goal is to be left alone in order to make policy decisions. They are successful inasmuch as executive decision-makers and elected politicians accept their image of the policy area for long periods of time (perhaps even taking it for granted), such that regulations are created and resources devoted to the problems as defined by subsystem actors. It was assumed that monopolies broke up or transformed during punctuations in policy equilibria, when their issues became politicized. As policy-making shifted out of subsystemic venues and into macro-political ones, the assumption was that the crises or events which triggered a punctuation also discredited the authority or legitimacy of the monopoly (Baumgartner and Jones 2009, 6–9). While a very useful heuristic, the policy monopoly concept was not fully theorized by Baumgartner and Jones. The effects and durability of subsystems was inferred rather than systematically analyzed. In
this dissertation, I begin to theorize the relationship between subsystem politics and policy change outcomes, suggesting that the power and persistence of subsystems is not so straightforward. Under typical circumstances, it is likely that the agenda-setting model pertains: policy monopolies that are highly influential during equilibria are transformed during punctuations. However, there can be circumstances when subsystems do not break up during punctuations in policy equilibria, and there could be subsystem-types that are more resilient, persisting and even retaining influence during reform episodes.

One such subsystem-type is a policy oligopoly. A policy oligopoly is a type of stable subsystem characterized by an inclusive yet bounded membership, a limited and instrumental consensus regarding policy image, and less hierarchical mechanisms for managing internal conflict. To exist, oligopolies must display the basic properties of any policy subsystem (structure, image, stability). Although policy monopolies have yet to be formally theorized in these terms, it is helpful to consider the presumptive characteristics of a monopoly in order contextualize a policy oligopoly. In general terms, oligopolies would typically be larger than monopolies, accommodate greater interpretive variation, with more symmetrical power relationships amongst members of the community. In terms of structure, oligopoly membership is heterogeneous, with no single government ministry or department dominating.\(^{49}\) With more actors involved (and more symmetrical relationships between them), moderate dissent must be accommodated. A characteristic structural feature of a stable oligopoly – they are not impervious to instability – are enduring and predictable coalitions. These coalitions allow subsystem actors to deliberate over the policy image in order to reach a modus vivendi.\(^{50}\) For policy image, members of a

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\(^{49}\) While this analysis theorizes the effects of subsystems, not their causes, it is still interesting to think about how such institutional structures develop. A hypothesis for future research is that policy oligopolies occur in issue areas or political settings in which jurisdictional responsibilities are more ‘horizontal’, either because the issue area is so new and interdependent that it has not been fully ‘colonized’ by a single ministry or department, or because the policy area is decentralized based on political jurisdictions.

\(^{50}\) This is not deliberation in the classic Habermasian sense, in which a decision-making process is open to all those affected by the decision, with relatively equal rights, resources, and opportunities for participation, and an
policy oligopoly must share an interpretation of at least some significant issues (and a commitment to
resolve them collectively), but need not have congruent ideologies or policy aims. Perhaps a reason why
oligopolies are so resilient is that their membership can reach consensus on solutions to *political*
problems even when they cannot agree on definitions of *policy* problems. Stable oligopolies perpetuate
themselves by amending the policy status quo in such a way that it consolidates the political status quo
and their governance role. Finally, oligopolies are stable because they can internalize conflict by
absorbing rather than expelling disparate views. Policy oligopolies create an internal space for policy
deliberation in order to reach a minimum consensus about policy design, because the point is to present
a united front (and shared policy image) such that the subsystem conveys control over the issues. This
typically means ignoring highly-politicized issues during their internal deliberations, and then trying to
depoliticize (or instrumentalize) these issues during ‘external’ consultations in the macro-political arena.

A policy oligopoly is a subsystem type that is flexible enough to accommodate limited dissent, yet also
stable enough to manage the policy agenda in other venues.

2.4.3 Operationalizing a Policy Oligopoly

The core claim in this dissertation is that a policy oligopoly is a sufficient condition for instrument
transformation during punctuations in policy equilibria. A minimum requirement for this claim is that
oligopolies demonstrably exist independent of their effects. There must be distinct and observable
evidence of institutional arrangements which establish and maintain membership, its members must
behave as if these rules or norms are meaningful, and they must share some interpretation of issues. For
a subsystem to be stable, members must work together to interpret issues collectively, even if

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ambition of reaching consensus on the common good vis-à-vis the most reasonable arguments (Dryzek 2006).
Rather, deliberation over policy design is a form of non-coercive ‘reason-giving’, which can include candid
admissions of self-interest as well as arguments about the common good. This form of decision-oriented
communication involves arguing and bargaining, yet remains deliberative because it has the critical qualities of
non-coercion and mutual justification (Mansbridge et al. 2010).
perspectives are somewhat conflicting. All the aforementioned properties (structure, policy image, and stability mechanisms) are necessary for an oligopoly to exist in a given policy area. 51

In Table 1 below, I detail indicators for observing and measuring an oligopoly in practice. Each property has institutional and behavioural indicators, the former providing evidence of the rules and norms that institutionalize the properties, and the latter providing evidence for how these rules and norms affect the behaviour of subsystemic actors. Taken alone, no single indicator is evidence of a policy oligopoly, and negative values for any of the indicators (within the positive case of Germany) would discredit the concept. Furthermore, positive evidence for all indicators is still not conclusive proof of concept, although this would be a hoop test for its plausibility. The combination of positive evidence of a policy oligopoly in one case (supported by the dynamics of agenda management), and evidence of oligopoly absence in another (supported by a reversion from an agenda-management to an agenda-setting model) would suffice to establish the fundamental plausibility of an agenda-management model of policy change. More research would be needed to develop further hypotheses from the model.

Table 1: Properties of an Oligopoly: Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First property (structure): bounded and inclusive membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional indicators</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presence of formal/informal criteria for membership of government actors, such that not every department or ministry affected by the issue is represented in the subsystem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presence of codified rights or informal norms regarding representation by pressure participants, which legitimize membership in the subsystem for a particular issue area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evidence of a formal or informal agreement for deliberation within the policy community, including rules or norms that differentiate deliberation from consultation. Deliberative bodies can take the form of standing organizations, committees, commissions, or regular meetings, with participation rights and responsibilities made explicit in a covenant, agreement or legislation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presence of an administrative body to manage participation and communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavioural indicators</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

51 The conditions measured here are necessary for a policy oligopoly, but the degree to which they alone are sufficient for an oligopoly cannot be determined from this research. I briefly discuss the emergence and evolution of subsystems in later chapters, but systematically testing the sufficient conditions for different subsystem-types would require further investigation.
• Evidence of mutual recognition of legitimacy or rights amongst actors within the policy community
• Evidence of informal coalitions with enduring policy preferences and predictable membership (specific to oligopolies).

**Second property (policy image): shared interpretation of issue area**

**Institutional indicators**
- Institutional acknowledgement of a shared issue, dilemma or problem, requiring action delivered exclusively by community members or their delegates.

**Behavioural indicators**
- Evidence of shared understanding of the boundaries of the issue, and of the policy community. The boundaries of the issue area can have spatial, temporal and/or jurisdictional dimensions.
- Evidence of agreement on criteria for expert authority
- Evidence of basic agreement on technical aspects of issue, and consensus that the policy subsystem contains the technical expertise to interpret and solve these aspects.
- Evidence of mutual understanding of other actors’ interests or values; fundamental agreement with interests or values not required (specific to oligopolies).

**Third property (stability): conflict management mechanisms**

**Institutional indicators**
- Presence of mechanism(s) to depoliticize the issue area by narrowing the terms of reference or scope of deliberation. This could include formal or informal agreements to deliberate over technical aspects of an issue or to disaggregate policy into sub-dimensions to be designed independently of one another.

**Behavioural indicators**
- Evidence of deliberation amongst members of a subsystem, which excludes other pressure participants, government actors from other departments or jurisdictions, political party representatives, and the general public.
- Evidence of shared norms of privacy allowing members of the community to express real policy preferences.

### 2.5 Causal Mechanisms Linking Sectoral Institutions to Policy Change Outcomes

For an agenda-management model, as with other models in the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework, the mechanisms of policy change are framing and venue-control. In the standard (agenda-setting) model, many actors – perhaps even subsystem actors – can become dissatisfied with the status quo and try to set a reform agenda. These actors exploit opportunities to politicize issues and escalate conflict, to draw the attention of politicians and the public. They use trigger events, crises, and other evidence of status quo failure to frame a policy area negatively, and try to move debates into venues where their policy
preferences might be realized. If these strategies are successful, then the outcome can be profound policy change. In an agenda-management model, these same mechanisms also explain how transformative change can be curtailed during episodes when the status quo has been challenged. Subsystem actors tend to be highly sensitive to reform, because there is the risk that the consequences of policy change will leave them worse off – especially politically. In the cases here, subsystem actors were reacting to reform agendas they did not set themselves, so framing and venue control were used as strategies of resistance to change, employed to retain influence over a policy sector, and manage or limit the forms and degrees of change. For both the agenda-setting and agenda-management model, the mechanisms are the same, although who uses them and how they influence policy change outcomes can vary. Below, I explain how subsystem actors use framing and venue control as strategies of resistance, and why these are also causal mechanisms which link institutions to particular forms of policy change.

2.5.1 An Agenda-Management Model: Subsystem Actors and Strategies of Resistance

Once a subsystem no longer controls the policy agenda during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium, actors within the subsystem use framing and venue-control as strategies to resist (or at least shape) potentially unfavourable reform episodes. Actors have three basic strategies for handling a reform agenda set by others: capitulation (to fight other battles); blame-shifting and venue-shopping; or managing the macro-political agenda vis-à-vis framing and venue control.

One strategy is to accept reforms as they come, either because they are indeed preferable to a suboptimal status quo, or because subsystem actors do not have the power to intercede even when reforms leave them worse off. This could be the only strategy available in unstable subsystems in which actors are also weak and fragmented. A government that is determined to reform a policy area can bring significant resources to bear, such that weak or disorganized resistance might be better off conceding
and hoping for future gains elsewhere. In this scenario, we might anticipate agenda-setting dynamics and significant transformation of a policy area.

The opposite strategy is to try to block reforms by further politicizing the issue in order to wrest back some influence over outcomes. The issue has already been politicized somewhat (by virtue of a punctuating event) so subsystem actors who perceive reform as potentially unfavourable can try to bring allies into the debate to block reforms. This is especially prevalent for unstable subsystems.

Subsystem actors begin to struggle (also with each other) to manage the reform agenda: they begin to reframe issues in a way that allows them to avoid blame, or shift blame onto others (typically other subsystem actors). This strategy thus expands the scope of conflict, and moves debate into venues with new veto opportunities, such as the legislature, the judiciary, the electoral arena, or even the public sphere via media or social movements. Typically, it will only be powerful subsystem actors who employ this strategy of ‘blame-shifting’ and ‘venue-shopping’. Here, power refers to both significant political resources (because they must mobilize allies, expertise, and so on), and sufficient legitimacy (because they must appeal to other societal actors in wider venues). It is also a risky political strategy, as it can put both the reform proposals and the subsystem into flux, as public battles are fought to regain control over the policy area. The dissonant policy image can be problematic for decision-makers, prompting them to seek information from other sources. Furthermore, if actors in the subsystem cannot resume some control over the policy agenda, then the subsystem as they knew it becomes inert – effectively destroyed – and the best the actors can do is to stake a claim in the new subsystem once public attention has again receded. In this scenario, we might anticipate agenda-management dynamics (i.e., framing and venue-control) that give way to agenda-setting dynamics (i.e., framing and venue-shopping)

52 Expanding the scope of conflict is a strategy that prevents political elites from easily realizing policy or political outcomes undesirable to a some subsystem actors: “it is the loser who calls for outside help” (Schattschneider 1960, 16).
53 This is an outcome predicted by the conventional agenda-setting model: once a monopoly (or other subsystem-type) loses its monopoly of understanding, the subsystem breaks down during punctuations in policy equilibria.
once policy design discussions have moved into macro-political or public spheres. It is difficult to anticipate the degree or form of policy change, as this strategy can lead to unintended outcomes and much depends on tactics, timing, and other political events. However, at least some of the subsystem is hoping to obstruct reform, and thus a reversion to the status quo is one likely outcome.

Between these two extremes is a strategy available to actors in subsystems that are stable and well-structured, such as policy oligopolies. This strategy entails conveying a united front and somewhat positive policy image in spite of sudden unwanted attention. Stable subsystems can frame issues positively by acknowledging problems yet defining them as technical issues with instrumental solutions, the details of which are best managed back in the subsystem. The policy status quo has been discredited, some reform is necessary, but actors try to depoliticize aspects of the issue by asserting that they are capable of managing the implementation of reforms. Rather than have policy design discussions move into other venues, issues are framed in ways that allow the discussion to return to venues that the oligopoly can control. In this agenda-management scenario, it is anticipated that the strategies employed by actors in a stable oligopoly will lead to more intermediate forms of policy change, such as successful changes to instrumental logic.

2.5.2 An Agenda-Management Model: Institutions and Mechanisms of Stability

In this model, the strategies above demonstrate how different processes of change get initiated and lead to different policy outcomes. However, this is not just a story of agency and entrepreneurship, as if subsystem actors could merely select whichever strategy best suited their political or policy preferences, or high-level decision-makers could simply choose from a large menu of policy designs. Framing and venue-control are only available – and effective – given particular institutional arrangements. In the cases here, the policy options available to decision-makers, and the strategies available to subsystem actors, were highly determined by institutions. Below, I discuss why institutions mattered so much for education policy-making, and how specific institutions structure forms of policy change.
2.5.2.1 Why Institutions Matter for Policy-making

Institutions structure the relationships between actors in policy and political arenas, influence their strategies by reducing uncertainty about outcomes or the preferences of others, and can even shape those preferences over the long term. The agenda-management model – indeed the PEF in general – assumes that actors are ‘boundedly rational’: they rationally pursue relatively stable policy preferences, yet are faced with cognitive and environmental constraints which limit their attention across and within issues and create uncertainty about how to reach their goals. Institutional arrangements are thus a means for managing the limits and unknowns of decision-making; they are ‘the scaffolds humans erect’ for understanding and interacting with the human environment.  

I elaborate on two reasons why institutions matter for policy-making: due to the selective attention of decision-makers (which tends to reinforce the policy status quo) and because of strategic considerations of decision-makers (which tends to reinforce the political status quo).

Busy decision-makers can only pay attention to a small number of issues at any given time; they are ‘serial processors’ of information that make decisions one issue at a time (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Simon 1977). Because of the selective attention of the high executive, there are institutions within policy sectors which operate as parallel processors of information, allowing specialists to devote full attention to a policy area and learn about issues in some detail. Yet attention across issues is not the only cognitive impairment faced by decision-makers. When attention has been drawn, there are also constraints regarding which aspects of an issue to focus on. One such constraint is cognitive bias: actors have attentional deficits within issues because pre-existing cognitive ideas limit their reasoning capacity (Jacobs 2009). This bias manifests as a kind of intellectual path dependence, where existing paradigms

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54 This is not to say that form follows function: institutions initially developed to reduce uncertainty can eventually create uncertainty when conditions change. Institutions are stabilizing, but inefficient: “The major role of institutions in a society is to reduce uncertainty by establishing a stable (but not necessarily efficient) structure to human interaction” (North 1990, 6).
and policy legacies perpetuate certain ways of thinking about issues, and systematically exclude certain lines of thought due to selective exposure. Aside of how this empowers the policy status quo, cognitive bias has implications for individual policy preferences and actor behaviour. Core beliefs and policy goals typically change very slowly, and actors tend to rely on established paradigms for framing problems, paradigms also embodied in institutional arrangements. Absent the time or incentives to really learn about an issue, actors look to parallel information-processing institutions to help them align their (relatively stable) policy preferences with the issues at stake.

Another reason institutions are so important is that they structure the strategies and tactics of decision-makers. Executive decision-makers accrue much power and prestige from their position (in some cases, material benefit as well), and this affects their judgement when attending to issues.55 This is not to say that executive decision-makers will abandon their policy goals altogether, but rather they understand that retaining power is different than attaining it: one’s policy beliefs or goals might get you into office, but policy performance is what keeps you there. In practical terms, this means that executive decision-makers systematically ignore policy proposals where they would take sole responsibility for negative outcomes, or where positive outcomes cannot be measured for a decade or more. Thus, office-holders tend to be ‘satisficers’; willing to compromise somewhat on policy goals if it allows them to claim credit or avoid blame.56 Given the strategic considerations of decision-makers, certain

55 Rational actors are reluctant to consider proposals that would hold them responsible for policy failure and possibly cost them their job. Arguably, the more that is at stake the stronger a ‘self-preservation’ bias becomes.
56 Office-seeking behaviour often prevails over policy-seeking behaviour, and under the right conditions, stable policy preferences will be discounted further and faster than relatively fixed office-seeking preferences. In the context of education policy, office-seeking rarely means vote-seeking. To speak of vote-seeking behaviour in this context, a candidate or government official would need some sense of the educational policy preferences of the median-voter. This information has been unavailable from polling because education is far too complex to be a valence issue, in the sense that only one side of the issue is considered legitimate, or that voters come to expect a particular party to be able to ‘deliver’ quality educational outcomes. Indeed, even when education issues have been a significant element in an electoral platform (as they were in the run up to the French presidential elections in 2007, the 2005 election in North Rhine-Westphalia, and the 2008 election in Bavaria), much of the contestation pertained to incumbent performance, not voter preferences. Furthermore, education has seldom been a decisive electoral issue in European countries, so vote-seeking is salient only inasmuch as high government officials do not wish to be blamed for policy failure and risk losing office via a cabinet shuffle or the electoral defeat of their
organizations and institutions can convey information about which policies will ‘work’ and send clear signals about the pragmatism of reforms. These institutions tend to reinforce the political status quo because they help decision-makers prioritize between preferences, and provide information about which reforms will allow elected government to claim credit for policy performance without trading off their most fundamental policy goals. To sum up, decision-makers are assumed to rationally pursue their policy preferences, yet not always know how to achieve them given information deficits, cognitive bias, and office-seeking behaviour. Sectoral policy design institutions are a means to bring these things into focus.

2.5.2.2 How Institutions Stabilize Policy: The Institutional Foundations of Education Policy

That institutions matter for both policy change and stability is well-established, although which institutions matter and how they matter varies by regime type, policy area, and political circumstance. In an agenda-management model, framing and venue-control connect different institutions involved in policy-making, such that the strategies of actors in subsystems can structure the choices of actors in macro-political institutions. In this section, I examine three types of institutions involved in education policy: social institutions (schooling), political institutions (branches of government) and sectoral ‘sense-making’ institutions (policy subsystems). I also discuss how these institutions reinforce the status quo.

Social Institutions: Schooling and Street-level Bureaucrats

From the perspective of end-users (i.e., students and parents), the institution that most reflects education policy is the school. As a social institution, the school system is responsible for implementing policies made elsewhere. Compared to other policy sectors, the ‘street-level bureaucrats’ in education are particularly powerful (Lipsky 1980): School-level administrators and especially teachers are highly autonomous in policy implementation, and policy-makers are cognizant of this when making choices.

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political party. Office-seeking in this context means that cabinet members or heads of government want to be seen performing well and making ‘good’ policy decisions.
Actors from other policy-relevant institutions might have distinct preferences regarding education policy, but will temper these during moments of choice because of pragmatic concerns that radical or unpopular policies will be poorly implemented at ‘street level’ (i.e., in schools and classrooms) where enforcement is difficult. The principle-agent dynamic that exists between decision-makers and policy implementers reinforces the status quo, contributes to the high levels of uncertainty faced by policymakers in macro-political institutions (see scope conditions below), and partially explains the need for sectoral institutions of policy design.

*Macro-political Institutions: Agenda-setters and Formal Veto Players*

Macro-political institutions are the institutions we normally think about when analyzing policy and comparing political jurisdictions: constitutions, branches of government, levels of government, political parties, welfare states, international organizations, and so on. Many of the parameters of macro-political institutions are formally established through written rules or regulations, while procedures and practices are often supplemented by long-standing norms or habits. Certain actors have the formal right to veto policies, based on their position within these institutions. Others have the (often informal) right to propose policy and set the policy agenda, especially when events induce them to act (i.e., as a punctuation in the policy equilibrium).

The government executive is the initial veto point for any education policy, and typically the elected executive (or their political appointees) are also agenda-setters. Policy ideas can emerge from a multitude of sources, but concrete policy proposals – whether they require legislation or not – are most

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57 The *Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions* refers to a number of others as well, devoting a chapter to each. A notable political institution not discussed in this section is the welfare state regime. The political economy matters for education policy (as noted in the literature review in the introductory chapter), and regime-type does figure prominently in the scope conditions and background context for the cases here. However, although economic institutions can structure education, economic actors are peripheral to specifying policy content, and thus I narrow the analysis to those institutions directly involved in policy-making. Amongst these, I refer to ‘political institutions’ as macro-political institutions, inasmuch as other types of institutions are ‘political’ as well – school systems and fields of experts are institutions, and just as rife with politics. Thus, it is helpful to distinguish between macro-political institutions of ‘high politics’, like the government executive, legislatures, and the judiciary, from other state-supported institutions of ‘daily politics’, such as bureaucracies and social institutions.
often the remit of a sitting government with the mandate to represent the interests of a majority (or plurality) of the electorate. Heads of government or education ministers need not actually consider constituents when contemplating policy, but their popular legitimacy allows them to set the policy agenda. Other venues of high politics – such as legislatures or constitutional courts – can act as formal veto points, depending on the policies in question. However, while theories of veto power can explain many policy change outcomes by evaluating the behaviour of formal veto players (legislatures, for instance), these theories do not sufficiently explain why reforms get managed or obstructed by the executive. Indeed, for the cases examined here, the other formal veto points were not a crucial factor. Certainly, the executive had to consider the risk of veto from legislatures and judiciaries, but the policy agendas were presented to these other institutions as more or less a fait accompli, with the battles already fought within (or between) executives. It was not that formal vetoes did not count, it was just that informal norms regarding how the governing executive had set the policy agenda meant that legislators were faced with a delicately balanced ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ proposition (see Tsebelis 2002, 34–36). If they left it, they risked being personally blamed for sub-optimal outcomes. Thus, formal veto power was somewhat circumscribed by partisan pressure and blame avoidance: Legislatures, the judiciary, and other macro-political institutions mattered, but they were put in a position where they felt somewhat compelled to accept an agenda set by the government executive.

Macro-political institutions are integral to any analysis of policy-making, but due to the dynamics of policy punctuations and the scope conditions of these cases, some of these institutions mattered more than others. For education reform during punctuations in the policy equilibrium, the governing executive was critical for setting the agenda, while the public bureaucracy, political parties, and international organizations vied for influence over the content of policy and forms of policy change. Indeed, all of these types of organizations could try to engage in framing and venue-control to manage the macro-political agenda. However, I contend that the organizations that had the most capacity to use
these strategies and influence that agenda were in the sectoral-institutional field, comprising educational bureaucrats and policy implementers.

*Sectoral Institutions: Subsystems and Policy Designers*

Sectoral institutions are specific to areas of public policy, reflecting the different types of expertise, issues and problems encountered in each facet of the welfare state. The purpose of these institutions is to manage complexity, interpret issues and problems, and design solutions for harried non-specialists who operate much of the time in the institutions of ‘high’ politics. “[Subsystems] are created by the complexity of the national policy agenda, and they help sustain that complexity. They are also most prevalent and influential in the least visible policy areas” (Ripley and Franklin 1984, 8). Although education is hardly invisible in many countries, subsystems tend to contribute to the opacity of policy development because they are not directly implicated in either the delivery or the legislation of education policy.\(^{58}\) Sectoral institutions can therefore structure the forms of policy change that emerge from macro-political institutions because they frame issues and control venues in ways that constrain policy choices as much as enable them. During periods of policy stability, subsystems have a ‘thermostatic’ effect on policy change; they are a source of negative feedback which systematically dampens pressure for change. An agenda-management model suggests that subsystems can also have dampening effects *during* reform episodes. The politics of subsystems – and sectoral institutions in general – are understudied aspects of comparative public policy, and education is a sector with the scope conditions and contingent circumstances conducive to increasing our understanding of these political dynamics.

\(^{58}\) Furthermore, unlike social or macro-political institutions, the relationships between sectoral and macro-political institutions (and subsystem features) emerge from informal practice. There are seldom any constitutional rules or formal policies mandating consultation between decision-makers and particular subsystem actors, during the development of policy. A policy subsystem is an analytical construct not a formal, concrete institution. Yet subsystems matter nonetheless, due to norms regarding consultation or deliberation with area specialists.
2.6 Propositions of an Agenda-management Model

An agenda-management model is a middle range theory that is relevant for punctures in policy equilibria conditioned by high pressure and high uncertainty. The scope conditions that distinguish an agenda-management model from other models of policy change are discussed in the next section. Yet on the basis of the theoretical framework above, I advance two theoretical propositions about the
power of the status quo during punctuations in policy equilibria. First, that a policy oligopoly is a highly likely condition for a significant change in the instrumental logic of policy. Second, that the stability of a policy oligopoly can sustain it through punctuations in policy equilibria. I elaborate on each proposition below.

The first proposition hypothesizes a relationship between subsystems and patterns of policy change given certain scope conditions. For policy sectors characterized by state insulation, an ‘external’ trigger punctuating the equilibrium can have unpredictable effects. Yet the existence of a policy oligopoly greatly increases the likelihood of a significant change in instrumental logics, because of the causal mechanisms previously described. Outcomes of disruptive reform episodes cannot be entirely predicted by any model of policy change, yet this proposition suggests that during such an episode, where we see a change in instrumentation we will also likely see a policy oligopoly. Furthermore, a close reading of the mechanisms and processes that lead from oligopoly to re-instrumentation can render a high degree of confidence for an agenda-management model, and the plausibility of this proposition. If verified, it speaks to the power of the policy status quo: a chief implication being that policy transformations can be managed, even during highly disruptive episodes of reform.

The second proposition hypothesizes a relationship between the properties of a subsystem and its durability during disruptive reform episodes: Stable subsystems will continue to exert influence despite the destabilizing characteristics of punctuations in policy equilibria. A subsystem that loses all its influence over decision-makers effectively ceases to exist, because governments them make political interventions influenced by other (typically macro-political) variables or factors. If it can be verified

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59 This proposition does not suggest that an oligopoly is a necessary condition for change in instrumentation. Nor can I yet claim it is a sufficient condition without further observations of correlation in other cases. However, the internal validity of the positive and negative cases analyzed here can speak to the high degree of likelihood of a correlation between oligopoly and re-instrumentation (given certain scope conditions).

60 Because subsystems are conceptual constructs, not formal institutions, they only meaningfully exist inasmuch as they have effect on policy-making. The organizations and actors within a subsystem continue to exist whether or not that subsystem is influential – and indeed, might continue to exert influence independently. Yet for them to
that a stable form of subsystem – an oligopoly – is demonstrably influential even during disruptive reform episodes, we can take this as proof of concept. This verification would entail evidence of the causal mechanisms proposed above: framing and venue-control. While these mechanisms exist in other processes of policy change (notably an agenda-setting model), they should exist in distinct ways that verify an agenda-management model and the plausibility of the proposition. This proposition speaks to the power of the political status quo: the implication being that subsystems are not necessarily destroyed or transformed during punctuations in policy equilibria, and can continue to exert influence vis-à-vis policy design.

2.7 Scope and Antecedent Conditions

There are a number conditions that determine the scope of this theory, and delineate the universe of cases to which it might apply. Scope conditions establish the generalizability of the theory, and the types of features that cases must have for an agenda-management model to pertain. Antecedent conditions establish the relevance of the particular cases analyzed here, Germany and France, within that universe. Broadly-speaking, there are three scope conditions for the theory, which also exist as antecedent conditions in the cases examined here. The first two pertain to policy equilibria: the neo-corporatist characteristics of the policy-making regime, and high levels of uncertainty as an inherent characteristic of education as an area of public policy. Together, these conditions mean that the state is expected to insulate the policy sector from external pressure. The third condition pertains to punctuations, and refers to the acute external pressure generated by globalization (and more precisely, the rankings generated by intergovernmental organizations).

exist in an institutional field, they must affect policy-making in a collective or coordinated way. Notably, stability does not vary independently; it is a property that co-varies with other subsystem properties (structure and image).
2.7.1 Scope Conditions: Decision-Making under High Pressure and High Uncertainty

The scope conditions are discussed in order of generalizability to other cases, policy-making regime-type being the narrowest and internationalization pressures the broadest. What we can take from this discussion is that these conditions can exacerbate the attention deficits and cognitive limits of executive decision-makers, and make them reconsider their strategies and policy choices. The scope conditions make policy-makers even more reliant on information-processing institutions, such as (but not only) policy subsystems.

A number of continental European welfare states have cultivated some form of consultation between employers and employees in many areas of public policy, and can be loosely grouped together on the neo-corporatist end of the regime spectrum. Compulsory education does not neatly conform to the concept of neo-corporatism due to the role of the state as employer, employee and referee in negotiations, yet the culture of neo-corporatism can still have meaningful impact on how executive decision-makers behave and deliberate over educational issues. Traditionally, this has meant that teacher representatives expect to be consulted (and even provide consent) for major policy decisions. Education ministers are seldom legally obliged to consult or seek consent with teachers before making many decisions, and on occasion, they might justify decisions based on implicit consent from other stakeholders (such as students, parents, or society-at-large). Yet the executive in neo-corporatist policy-making regimes seek some information about the preferences of powerful policy users even if only to confirm basic goals or preferences. The effect this has on attention and bias is to immediately eliminate any reform proposals that would result in ‘bloody revolt’ by powerful policy users. Indeed, any policies that threaten the political status quo, such as those involving governance or implementation, could be challenged by corporate actors accustomed to consultation or deliberation. The general policy-making

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61 For public education, this can mean things like privatizing education as a whole, or outsourcing teaching jobs to professionals who lack pedagogical training.
regime itself imposes limits for reform, in terms of which reform agendas are even conceivable, and who
must be consulted in the development of policies.

As a policy area, public education is characterized by high levels of uncertainty because of causal
complexity, institutional autonomy, interpretive ambiguity, and risky yet consequential outcomes. I
discuss the implications of each in turn. First, learning is a complex phenomenon, not well understood
despite a proliferation of education theories. Whether theories refer to teaching and learning, social
factors and success, or interventions and outcomes, the relationships between cause and effect are
rendered somewhat opaque because the mechanisms are largely invisible, and the number of
confounding or intervening variables is great. Add to this long time-horizons, where changes undertaken
today might not have measurable effect for a decade or more, and one can see that education is an
especially complex area for policy-makers. Even if causal processes were clear, implementation of
policies would not be, due to the size, complexity and autonomy of schools as social institutions. So
not only is the causal processing of policy-makers constrained by the uncertainties of educational
science, but many policy outcomes hinge on processes that are weakly controlled by policy-makers. A
third issue that contributes to high levels of uncertainty is ambiguity regarding the appropriate aims and
interpretations of education. Simply put, different actors have different goals – even different paradigms
– regarding the education system. That there is this variety of interpretation underlines the final form
of uncertainty in education policy-making: policy decisions are often risky and consequential. The

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62 Public education systems are lumbering beasts, with many different types of actors involved in policy
implementation. Schools operate relatively autonomously, and teachers even more so (even in countries where
curriculum is highly prescribed). Furthermore, once they are recruited and trained, teachers and administrators (of
schools and within the educational bureaucracy) can become staunch defenders of existing programs (Ambler
1987). Policies do change behaviour, but implementation occurs rather slowly as it filters through a system
characterized by high levels of complexity and autonomy.

63 For some (mainly education experts and specialists), education is an end in itself, and policies should reflect
certain fundamental educational values or the pedagogical processes for achieving those ends. For students and
teachers, education policy is largely about establishing appropriate conditions for learning, or for their labour. And
for non-specialists (typically parents, employers, and politicians), education is often instrumental to some broader
societal goal, be it vocational, social integration, political socialization, or economic benefit.
demands placed on education systems have been changing significantly and rapidly in response to new social and economic realities, and public education affects just about everyone in a society at some point. Decision-makers lack clear information about the consequences of their actions – will a policy created today even have relevance for the society of tomorrow? Even for routine day-to-day policy-making, education is a policy area characterized by very high levels of uncertainty, making decision-makers risk averse. Radical reforms can have unknowable consequences, so they will try to reduce these uncertainties by seeking information from reliable sources, making coherent frames presented by stable ‘sense-making institutions’ all the more important. All areas of public policy are conditioned by some degree of uncertainty, yet for public education more than most, this uncertainty contributes to an ‘insulating state’ dynamic.

Taking responsibility for outcomes over which there is limited understanding and weak control can make routine decision-making challenging enough, yet the particular circumstances of international educational rankings can put acute pressure on policy-makers. At the level of the high executive, government ministers pay attention to only a tiny portion of the issues for which they are responsible, so they unconsciously apply two inferential shortcuts to help them allocate attention: an ‘availability heuristic’ and a ‘representativeness heuristic’ (Gowda and Fox 2002; McDermott 2004; Weyland 2008). The availability heuristic causes decision-makers to overestimate information that is most available to them, such that vivid and drastic information takes on disproportionate relevance. The representativeness heuristic causes decision-makers to distort their judgment on whether information is truly representative – they tend to draw conclusions from excessively small samples and short time frames. These heuristics explain why international rankings are such a powerful political technology: they condense huge amounts of information into readily available (yet frequently misinterpreted) representations. That PISA rankings would draw attention is not surprising, but the nature of that attention is what requires further explanation. As a political technology, rankings can be presented as
crisis and failure. They can convey a sense of crisis because policymakers must act quickly to lower-than-expected rankings. Because rankings are iterative, there is a finite amount of time to demonstrate improvement (assuming policymakers take them seriously). Rankings can also indicate failure because they infer that some aspect of past policy has contributed to the current rank, although the rank itself does not indicate what specifically has failed. Thus, the policy status quo has been discredited and some kind of change deemed necessary, yet there is no clear indication from the ranking about which goals or beliefs are appropriate, how problems should be defined, or what kind of political interventions would improve things. Rankings portray a negative (or in other cases, positive) image of an issue area, but this frame is incomplete — until one unpacks the data that goes into how the ranking was established, the problems remain ill-defined, and existing policy preferences do not offer a clear roadmap. Executive decision-makers are under pressure to make the ‘right’ intervention, even though little they do will have a real effect in the short term, given the long cycles of education. Due to the brief cycles of electoral politics and public attention, however, they hope interventions will have a noticeable effect — on ranking if nothing else. Because of these dynamics, executive decision-makers pay attention to policy images, and to stable institutions which can convey a relatively coherent message. Again, this is not intended to theorize precisely where policy ideas come from, but rather, to point out that complex or incoherent signals about an issue area are challenging for the ‘high’ executive at the best of times, and anathema under conditions of high pressure. The acute external pressure generated by intergovernmental organizations is just such an environment.

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64 Even when data is analyzed and/or knowledge mobilized for a more complete image, new policies still might not improve one’s rank. Solving problems and improving the education system is one thing, but having that reflect in improvements to an ordinal ranking depends on what happens in other education systems (and for that matter, in the ranking methodology).

65 There are high level decision-makers who might relish the opportunity presented by unfavourable rankings to affect reform, yet they too face pressure to act quickly and make the right decision. Politicians who blame predecessors for poor rankings will find it difficult to avoid blame in the future for their policy choices, if things do not measurably improve.
2.7.2 Antecedent Conditions: The Power and Peculiarities of Cross-National Comparison

I posit that the scope conditions above are antecedent in the cases examined in this dissertation, and thus Germany and France (post-PISA ‘shock’) are appropriate for analysis by an agenda-management model. The historical background for each case is elaborated in the empirical chapters in order to demonstrate that a meso-level analysis is appropriate, that there are common essential conditions, and that the cases have relevant policy change outcomes. Yet historical background – a case’s context – also provides a preliminary understanding of the political and policy status quo. I refer to three types of context, which roughly correspond with the scope conditions above: political context, policy context and contingent context. Political context refers to the political institutions that determine which actors are powerful, and how they exercise that power. These are the rules and norms that establish the constellation of veto players (formal and informal) and guide political behaviour in a specific policy area. Policy context is shorthand for the sum total of previous policy in a given issue area, which shapes the perceptions of stakeholders and decision-makers. It forms both the baseline status quo from which the degree of policy change must be judged, as well as the cognitive and normative paradigms through which actors operate. What I call the contingent context refers to factors unique to each case, yet with comparable effects across cases, such as timing and cumulative pressure of international comparisons. Unlike political and policy context, the contingent context is not directly comparable between cases, because certain events or trends – things like election outcomes, economic performance, media stories, or debates from other areas of politics – can powerfully influence how actors interpret ideas or understand their interests in one setting, yet barely register in another. For example, a media story that breaks during an election campaign can have very different impact than the same story immediately following a landslide electoral victory. Yet rather than argue that specific histories lead to unique outcomes, I look for systematic and generalizable causal factors which help to explain comparable outcomes. The background context is often but not always at the scale and scope of the macro-political,
such that macro-political variables are instrumental for shaping – yet not fully determining – policy change. A critical intervening variable between context and outcome, and one that is analyzed in depth in this dissertation, are the (meso-level) policy design institutions specific to the education policy sector. Generally-speaking, the background context should reinforce my findings regarding the role of sectoral institutions for managed or obstructed policy reforms, not counter them. Where the behaviour of actors or the proposed role of institutions does not ‘make sense’ given the legacies in particular cases, then we can take this as disconfirming evidence of the model presented. I turn now to other models of policy change which are plausible for these cases.

2.8 Alternative Explanations

There are myriad factors that contribute to explanations of policy change in comparative public policy, all involving some combination of three major explanatory variables: ideas, interests and institutions. These variables are not mutually exclusive, yet models tend to emphasize the importance of one over others. For an agenda-management model, a change in instrumentation is made possible by institutions. Theories which emphasize ideas or interests might offer a superior account of one or both of the cases analysed here, but before considering them, a few comments on which alternative explanations are worth testing. To begin with, I suggest that an agenda-management model accounts for the outcome in both cases, and explains the variance between them. Perhaps there is an explanation that is more compelling for one case, but unable to adequately explain the other. If we accept case-specific explanations as superior, then this suggests that these cases are really two different phenomena, requiring different models to explain them. However, as I argue in the introduction (see ‘Case Selection’), these cases can and should be compared, and thus we seek a model that can bridge the two.

66 We can now add to this a fourth causal variable: instruments. ‘Instrumentation’ and the path dependency of instrument choices have become burgeoning research fields in their own right (see Bell and Stevenson 2006; Hannaway and Woodroffe 2003; Hood 2007; Howlett 2004; Linder and Peters 1989, 1992, 1998). It is less use in this analysis because instrumentation is the dependent variable.
Nonetheless, models that fully explain a single case—without significant recourse to sectoral institutions—would still be considered rival explanations, and evaluated. Further distinctions should be drawn regarding models that compare policy change across cases. On one hand, there are alternative explanations which might be viable for policy change, yet are not plausible for these specific cases or policies. As an example of this, I draw attention to what I call ‘environmental models’, in which education policy change is a functional response to wider cultural changes or socio-economic pressures and demands. For these models, the causal factors might be present, but the mechanisms connecting independent to dependent variables are either indiscernible or unsystematic (in the cases and policies examined here). On the other hand, there are potential explanations which are plausible across both cases, yet are not rivalrous. The logic is valid and variables are specific, yet the approach does not directly challenge an agenda-management model because it cannot explain the form of policy change in these cases. Other models might complement the findings presented here by explaining the timing of punctuations in the equilibrium or the source of policy content, without specifying the reasons for forms of change. Therefore, only alternative explanations which are specific, causal, plausible across both

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This family of explanations conforms to one of two logics, both of which are more capable of explaining larger long-run trends in education (and the stability of education systems) than they are at explaining changes to policy instruments. A ‘constitutivist’ model operates according to a logic of appropriateness, in which education policy changes as a response to changes in political culture, discourse, or international norms (see Baldi 2010; Boli, Ramirez, and Meyer 1985; Breakspear 2012; Ertl 2006b; J. W. Meyer, Ramirez, and Soysal 1992; Schmidt 2007b, 2008). A ‘human capital’ model operates according to a logic of consequences, in which education policy changes because of changes in the production regime or demographics (see Culpepper 2003; Estévez-Abe, Iversen, and Soskice 2001; Iversen and Stephens 2008; Jenson 2012; Streeck 2012; Thelen 2004). These explanations are not implausible, but are less plausible for specific quality assurance policies because they underspecify causal mechanisms or the dependent variable.

Multiple Streams Approach does not proffer a model to explain forms of change in education policy, but could provide clues as to why a punctuation in the equilibrium happens, and why some policy ideas are favoured over others. In such a model, timing is a key variable for explaining policy, because if a policy entrepreneur (or bricoleur) wants to affect change, they must seize upon a window of opportunity to present ‘an idea whose time has come’ (see Carstensen 2011; Kingdon 1984, 2003; Mehta 2006; Simola and Rinne 2011; Wilder and Howlett 2014). This type of explanation could help us understand why particular reforms occurred in one case and not the other, but would under-specify why change was so differently moderated (across cases), and the conditions under which (intermediate) policy change would be expected (for criticism of MSA see Zahariadis 2007). In short, given the similarities of evidence and impetus, such a model would not answer why there were different forms of policy change in each case.
cases, and rivalrous to the agenda-management model are considered below. For each alternative, I identify the primary independent variable, the causal mechanism(s), the agents of change, the necessary conditions for successful instrumentation, and specify the indicators which would provide leverage for this explanation.

2.8.1 Alternative Explanation: Ideas

An established rival explanation is the ‘internationalization of education policy’, in which policy change is driven by changes to cognitive ideas or beliefs. This model is discussed in the introduction, and was actually applied to the cases analyzed here (see Dobbins 2014; Dobbins and Martens 2012; Jakobi 2007; Jakobi and Martens 2010; Jakobi, Teltemann, and Windzio 2010; Martens 2007; Martens et al. 2010; Martens and Weymann 2007; H.-D. Meyer and Benavot 2013; Niemann 2010, 2014, 2009; Windzio, Knodel, and Martens 2014). This theory is characteristic of other approaches to policy transfer or lesson drawing, in that national change is the result of ideas, norms or policy models diffused from one political jurisdiction to another, or from international organizations to national ones (see Dolowitz and Marsh 2000; Rose 1991; Stone 2001, 2012). As is typical for these forms of explanation, the mechanisms of diffusion and the international agents of transmission are better accounted for than the mechanisms of national policy change or the domestic agents of reception/translation. To overcome this, internationalization models could fruitfully be complemented by an ideational approach to domestic policy change, such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework, or ACF (Sabatier 1988, 1993, 1998; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Sabatier and Weible 2007; Weible, Sabatier, and McQueen 2009).\(^9\) Policy

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\(^9\) A variant on this with more of a (domestic) institutional focus would be a ‘knowledge regime’ model (Campbell 1998, 2002, 2004; Campbell and Pederson 2014; Haas 1992; Timmermans and Scholten 2006). This model suggests that policy change is the result of exposure to new ideas which emanate from evolving domestic knowledge regimes. This could be compatible with a number of different approaches, including the agenda-management model presented here. It is compatible with ACF and policy-internationalization models inasmuch as ideas are an important causal variable (although knowledge regimes emphasize the institutional origins of those ideas). It is also compatible with an agenda-management model inasmuch as institutions are an important causal variable, although the emphasis on knowledge regimes instead of subsystems neglects the importance of political institutions for decision-making. In other words, evolving knowledge regimes might indeed be important for
transfer and ACF theorize different parts of cognition, with the former explaining the source for ideas and the latter explaining how ideas are related to policy in the domestic context. As these approaches connect to one another in terms of variables and mechanisms, I assess them as an amalgam.

As this alternative explanation emphasizes ideas, cognitive beliefs are the primary independent variable, learning is the causal mechanism, and the agents of change are various types of ideational actors (especially important is the government high executive and experts from international organizations). ACF suggests that understanding the connection between learning and policy change means focusing on interactions between competing advocacy coalitions in the policy subsystem which, in turn, operate within a wider political system and international environment. ACF differs from PEF in a number of critical areas, including the primary independent variable (ideas or beliefs), the causal mechanisms (learning rather than attention) and who are the critical actors.

For an ideational model, one anticipates the following conditions to be necessary for intermediate forms of policy change: an external source for policy ideas (with a relatively high degree of fidelity between international models and domestic policies); a domestic coalition that advocates for reform; and congruence of secondary policy beliefs amongst all formal veto players. The presence of these conditions (for Germany in particular) is evidence that an ‘internationalization of education policy’ explains policy change.

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ACF has a much broader conception of policy subsystems than proposed in an agenda-management model (or PEF in general): “Our conception of policy subsystems should be broadened from traditional notions of iron triangles limited to administrative agencies, legislative committees, and interest groups at a single level of government to include actors at various levels of government, as well as journalists, researchers and policy analysts who play important roles in the generation, dissemination, and evaluation of policy ideas” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, 179). For ACF, there will be competing advocacy coalitions within subsystems: “people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers) who share a particular belief system - i.e. a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions - and who show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time” (Sabatier 1988, 139). In ACF, actors can be influential because they articulate ideas, regardless of their capacity to exercise power. Furthermore, subsystems are relatively open and multi-level institutions, which act as a battleground between ideational coalitions (who share a set of beliefs or cognitive models). This is a very different conception of agency and causality than an agenda-management model.

Actors within a coalition need not share ‘deep core beliefs’, which are akin to worldviews or underlying personal philosophies, often expressed as a point on the left/right ideological spectrum. Indeed, for the changes described
Distinct observable evidence for these conditions should be manifest in institutional and behavioural indicators, and if all such indicators are present in one or both cases, then this would present an insurmountable challenge to an agenda-management model. Institutional indicators centre on the nature of a policy subsystem. There would be evidence that the subsystem is relatively open to actors at different levels of governance (international, national and regional), as well as open to actors with little political power yet much legitimacy only as ‘sense-makers’ (such as academics, journalists, or representatives of international organizations). Behavioural indicators centre on the nature of deliberation between key actors within the subsystem and across the policy field, with minimum behavioural ‘hoop tests’ for the sources of ideas, as well as how they are used. Regarding the source of ideas, a set of cognitive concepts or theories must pre-exist and then correspond to changes in policy, and there should be evidence that actors – in this case transnational actors – functioned as transmission belts for these ideas. More compelling evidence would be the involvement of these actors early in the policy design process, plus a high degree of fidelity between their problem definitions and solution proposals, and the final policy outcomes. For behavioural indicators (i.e., how ideas were used in the policy process), the minimum hoop test would be evidence that all formal veto players shared at least secondary policy beliefs, if not core beliefs.\footnote{Presumably no actor powerful enough to veto policy would design policies they did not believe in, so we can take final policy outputs as indicators of shared belief. Interest groups could try to shape policy according to their own belief system, but if they did not subscribe to the dominant cognitive model then presumably they could be overwhelmed by an advocacy coalition which did not require their input or ideational agreement. This makes the role of the informal veto players less clear in ACF, because we anticipate that unconvinced interest groups would be ignored by a sufficient reform advocacy coalition that contained all formal veto players and was supported by experts. Therefore, if we see evidence of a battle between cognitive ideas that are more or less persuasive – rather than a battle between normative claims made by potential policy winners and losers intent on protecting their authority – this indicates the likelihood of an ideational explanatory model, and not merely ideas used as ‘cheap talk’ to conceal the interests of institutionally-empowered actors.} However, agreement over theories of cause and effect and shared ‘instrumental’ beliefs do not prove that ideas were the critical factor for change. There must also

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textbullet{}] Presumably no actor powerful enough to veto policy would design policies they did not believe in, so we can take final policy outputs as indicators of shared belief. Interest groups could try to shape policy according to their own belief system, but if they did not subscribe to the dominant cognitive model then presumably they could be overwhelmed by an advocacy coalition which did not require their input or ideational agreement. This makes the role of the informal veto players less clear in ACF, because we anticipate that unconvinced interest groups would be ignored by a sufficient reform advocacy coalition that contained all formal veto players and was supported by experts. Therefore, if we see evidence of a battle between cognitive ideas that are more or less persuasive – rather than a battle between normative claims made by potential policy winners and losers intent on protecting their authority – this indicates the likelihood of an ideational explanatory model, and not merely ideas used as ‘cheap talk’ to conceal the interests of institutionally-empowered actors.
\end{itemize}
be evidence that ideas mattered more than interests or institutions. Thus, the most compelling evidence would be if very powerful actors – veto players in particular – agreed to policy changes which go against their expressed preferences, or which diminish their power in political or policy-making institutions. A reasonable explanation for this kind of behaviour would be that powerful actors were persuaded by a concept or theory, such that they reconsidered their interests in light of it. When considering the necessary conditions for an ‘internationalization of education policy’ model, and the types of institutional and behavioural indicators which would demonstrate this, Germany reveals itself to be the more challenging test. Both cases will be probed for evidence of a theory of ideational diffusion and policy internationalization, but a cursory assessment suggests that if an agenda-management model fails on ideational grounds, then it will do so in Germany, if not France.

2.8.2 Alternative Explanation: Partisan Politics

A second rival explanation is a ‘partisan politics’ model, in which the degree of policy change is determined by changes to partisan actors or coalitions who make policy. Although there are no models which explicitly argue that the form of educational policy change is determined by political parties, one can extrapolate such an explanation from existing theories which explain related phenomena, such as levels of educational spending or degree of centralization (Ansell 2005, 2010; Ansell and Lindvall 2013; Busemeyer 2007, 2009b, 2012, 2013). This literature suggests that policy outcomes are determined by the ideological and electoral incentives faced by political parties, who have stable preferences shaped by the fixed and given interests of their electoral and interest-group base. The mechanism for policy change is a shift in the relations of power within political institutions (not changes to institutions themselves). For the cases and time periods examined here, political economies and electoral bases were relatively stable, so national policy transformation would be explained by a significant change in relations between actors with the power to set the policy agenda, such as a newly-elected government or a new coalition between government and a powerful interest group. Lesser degrees of policy change can be
explained by watered down policy choices, where reforms reflect the partisan interests of the most powerful actors, and changes to secondary policy aspects reflect compromise with less powerful actors.

A partisan politics model suggests that understanding the connection between partisanship and policy change means examining relationships between governments and interest groups, as well as inter-party dynamics. This model differs from PEF in critical areas, including the primary independent variable (electoral interests rather than sectoral institutions), the causal mechanisms (power-shifts not attention) and who are the critical actors.73 For such an interest-driven model, one anticipates the following conditions necessary for significant policy change: a partisan source for policy design (with a relatively high degree of fidelity between partisan policy designs and policy outputs); government formed by a political party seeking reform; and congruence in policy preferences across all partisan veto players (formal or informal). The degree to which these conditions are not met is the degree to which reforms can be compromised or managed.74 The presence of all these conditions (for France in particular) is evidence that the partisan-politics model explains the form of policy change.

Observable evidence of these conditions is indicated by political activity contained to particular institutions, and by the strategic behaviour of actors. The institutional indicators centre on the nature of policy design and the arenas of competition. Regarding the former, there would be evidence that policy was developed within the machinery of party politics – by parties themselves, or by partisan consultants (such as associations which represent the party’s electoral base). More compelling behavioural evidence would be if reforms (whether goals or instruments) were closely aligned to previous policy choices or

73 A partisanship model has a very narrow conception of the actors that matter for policy change outcomes. Policy designs emerge from political parties and/or their interest group allies, so subsystems (or experts) are superfluous. Managing the agenda is not meaningless, however, it is a strategy with limited effect. It is assumed that actors know which policies are in their interest, and thus use competition occurs primarily within (high) political institutions as actors fight over final policy choices.

74 For example, one might anticipate change in instrumentation if only two of these conditions were met: a partisan source for policy design and ideological congruence across all veto players in political institutions. The other condition (a reform-seeking political party) is unlikely if the government is an incumbent, because radical changes to educational aims or programming would be an admission of policy failure under its watch. Instead, an incumbent can avoid (and shift) blame by proposing a reform of instruments.
electoral promises before those actors were in power. Select arenas of competition are another behavioural indicator for partisan policy change, because certain venues provide political parties the opportunity to publicly claim credit for desirable reforms. Therefore, one would look for evidence that the government discussed its reform agenda in ‘macro-political’ institutions (the electoral arena, legislatures, and the press) more so than in closed venues, like subsystems. More compelling evidence would be if reforms were not merely discussed, but actually decided and made legitimate within macro-political venues rather than more private arenas. Indicators for this might include robust parliamentary debate of the reform agenda, and subsequent electoral campaigning on the basis of successful educational reforms.

As institutions, party organization and the macro-political arena are quite distinct, and have different rules and incentive structures for actors. However, a fundamental assumption behind an interest-driven account is that actors pursue stable policy preferences, institutions notwithstanding. The behaviour and tactics of actors might change according to venue, but their interests should not change. Thus, one would look for indicators of cooperative strategies in party-political institutions for policy design, indicated by consultations between a political party and stakeholder groups in order to ensure their interests aligned. One would also look for conflictual strategies in macro-political venues where partisan actors can battle over reform agendas, indicated by shifting blame for policy failure onto incumbent governments, the permanent bureaucracy, or teachers. In many respects, this would indicate ‘politics-as-usual’. However, if we see a very powerful veto player – faced with remote electoral or interest group sanction – choose (or allow) reform which requires them to amend their preferences or substantially accommodate the preferences of others, then I take this as strong disconfirmation of the partisan-politics model. When considering the necessary conditions for this model, and the types of institutional and behavioural indicators which would demonstrate it, France is the more challenging test. Both cases are tested for evidence of party-politics explanation, but a cursory assessment suggests that
if an agenda-management model fails, then we might look to this model to explain France, if not Germany.

2.9 Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented a model of agenda-management in which meso-level, sectoral institutions of policy design determine forms of policy change. Specifically, I refer to a new kind of stable subsystem called a policy oligopoly which led to successful ‘re-instrumentation’ – a kind of managed reform which significantly changed instrumental logic rather than the broad aims of policy – with an unstable policy monopoly resulting in more unpredictable outcomes. To develop this argument, I defined the differences between managed and obstructed reforms that occur during punctuations in policy equilibria, and introduced a model of policy change in which actors in an oligopoly can manage the macro-political agenda and control venues of policy development, while actors in unstable subsystems must resort to the risky political strategy of venue-shopping. This model has two implications: it refines our understanding of the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework, and suggests a more nuanced view of the relationship between meso-level institutions and policy change.

The Punctuated Equilibrium Framework suggests that policy change is characterized by durable and predictable episodes of policy stability, interspersed with short and unpredictable bursts of significant policy change. This agenda-management model builds on this framework, by arguing that punctuations in policy equilibria are not always unpredictable because sectoral policy-making institutions can have a stabilizing effect even during such punctuations. Part of the issue is that punctuations are typically defined by radical policy change, but this analytical strategy means selecting on the dependent variable. By looking at cases where the policy equilibrium was punctuated by triggering events, yet the policy outcome was not always transformative, one can see how institutional structures have lingering effects on forms of policy change. Where sectoral institutions were characterized by stable structures and a shared policy image – such as an oligopoly – this model predicts
a significant change in instrument logic rather than a transformative change in goals, or a paradigm shift. Where subsystems were unstable and characterized by an external competition over interpretation of policy issues, the model does not make predictions about the form or degree of policy change. However, it does suggest that patterns of policy-making can be forecasted: macro-political actors must then intervene and impose a policy design other than the one emerging from the subsystem. Although the outcome remains unpredictable, this model provides more information about the processes of policy change during punctuations in policy equilibria. The agenda management model thus adds to our knowledge of the dynamics of leptokurtic policy change, as characterized in the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework.

An agenda management model also suggests that we reconsider the relationship between institutions and policy, given the power of the status quo. The interesting thing about a change in instrumental logic is that it entails both a state of stability and a degree of change. One implication is that stable and structured subsystems can serve as a force for policy stability even during episodes of reform: they constitute ‘structure-induced equilibria’ which can fix policy according to particular interpretations of an issue (Baumgartner and Jones 2009, 238). A further implication is that the mechanisms for policy change might ultimately be the mechanisms for institutional change as well. Moving an issue onto the macro-political agenda undermines the institutions that routinely manage that issue when it is out of the public eye, and presents an opportunity to create new institutions for the design and implementation of policy after the attention of the public, media, and government ‘high’ executive has shifted elsewhere. Yet this ‘creative destruction’ of subsystems might not always be as dramatic or exogenous as in the cases examined by Baumgartner and Jones, such as nuclear policy in the USA (1993, 2009). I argue that subsystems can be more resilient and more adaptable under conditions dissimilar from the examples used by Baumgartner and Jones. Subsystems which can change ‘internally’ to accommodate new information, ideas, or interpretations will be well-placed not only to survive
punctuations to the policy equilibrium, but also to influence the form of policy change during those punctuations. Where subsystems fail to adapt to new actors and ideas, then one might anticipate the dynamics of framing and venue-shopping that we see in the conventional agenda-setting model of the PEF. Actors from unstable or maladapted subsystems struggle to manage the agenda for executive decision-makers, so they must decide whether to take the politically risky strategy of further politicizing the issue and escalating conflict into other venues. Doing so can make those actors more immediately relevant, but further undermines the stability (and durability) of the subsystem. In some circumstances, this can be a pyrrhic victory: undesirable policy change is blocked, but so too is the kind of institutionalized access to decision-makers that a subsystem represents. Therefore, there seems to be a kind of trade-off between policy and political stability, following critical junctures in which the status quo has been discredited. Oligopolies are perhaps structurally capable of finding the sweet spot: The political compromise of working with others who do not share one’s values or goals can allow one to reach a policy compromise and remain relevant for decision-making. Over the next two chapters, I illuminate these dynamics by examining cases of managed and obstructed reforms during punctuations in policy equilibria.

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75 This is where ideas and learning become crucial: less so at the macro-political level where veto players (and the general public) rarely have the time or attention to really learn about the issues, and more so at the subsystemic level where actors are immersed in these issues during their day-to-day work. In other words, subsystems that evolve structurally, prior to the critical junctures which force their issues onto the macro-political agenda, are more likely to transmit their institutional and ideational features onto that agenda, and are more likely to survive.
Chapter 3: German Education Reform and a National Policy Oligopoly

3.1 Introduction

On 4 December 2001, the OECD released the scores and rankings from the PISA 2000 international assessment to the public. Within forty-eight hours of this announcement, the Conference of German Länder Ministers of Education and Culture [Kultusministerkonferenz] (KMK) had announced a far-reaching agenda of educational reforms. The KMK issued an immediate press release composed by Annette Schavan (President of the KMK), Willi Lemke (Senator of Bremen and Vice-President of the KMK), Hermann Lange (Chair of the Deputy Ministers Committee for Quality Assurance in Schools [Amtschefskommission ‘Qualitätssicherung in Schulen’]) and Prof. Dr. Jürgen Baumert (Director of the Max Planck Institute for Education Research (MPIB) and principal investigator for the German PISA Consortium). Baumert described and interpreted the basic findings of PISA, Lemke discussed the need for new quality assurance mechanisms focussed on competence standards, Schavan spoke of creating a ‘new learning culture’, and Lange called for “a discussion of the results of the PISA investigations […] among as many participants as possible” (KMK 2001b). On 5 December, the KMK announced they had reached an agreement with the major teachers' associations on the consequences of the PISA study, including the need for improved quality assurance mechanisms and for further professionalization of teaching via training and research (KMK 2001a). On 6 December, at the conclusion of a two-day plenary, the KMK issued a ‘Catalogue for Action’ [Handlungskatalog] with seven major reforms agreed to by all sixteen Länder Ministers of Education. This Catalogue of Action entailed a number of policy commitments including new quality assurance mechanisms based on standards, and new teacher...

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76 This agreement made explicit reference to the Bremen Declaration of 5 October 2000, signed by then-President of the KMK, Willi Lemke, the Chairpersons of all the major teaching unions and associations, as well as the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) and the Beamtenbund (DBB). This Declaration recognized the difficult and important work that teachers do, the need for teachers to constantly develop their skills, and the need for both internal and external evaluations of teaching practice (KMK 2000).
training programs (Sekretariat der KMK 2001). Although the public discussion and media attention would continue for years after this ‘PISA shock’, a national policy agenda had been more or less established within two days. In the initial press release Hermann Lange had encouraged broad discussion of PISA, yet as far as actual policies were concerned, the Länder Ministries had received their preliminary marching orders and secured the acquiescence of the largest teachers’ union. This punctuation in the policy equilibrium would last about five years, from late 2001 until 2006, the time it took for the Catalogue of Action to be implemented in the Länder, and for the instrumental logic undergirding the new evaluation policies to be concretized. Public debates persisted in legislatures, the press, and academia, yet the reforms in the Catalogue of Action were largely out of the public eye, managed by administrators in the Länder and KMK, working alongside education experts.

In this chapter, I present empirical evidence for the causes of managed reforms in Germany, in which the instrumental logic behind evaluation was transformed, yet not the fundamental structures or orientation of German education. Primary documents and interviews reveal that the proximate cause for this form of policy change was the management of the policy-making agenda by a bounded set of actors working cohesively within the KMK – in other words, a national policy oligopoly. This special form of subsystem emerged in the 1990s, and can be distinguished from the (sub-national) policy subsystems that preceded it because of its national structure, its shared image of policy means (if not aims), and its stabilizing mechanisms overseen by the KMK. This oligopoly limited policy design to a group of actors in the KMK, who then managed the reform agenda when education became a public and politicized issue in the early 2000s. One might have seen greater change, or none at all, had this national oligopoly not managed the flow of policy design and models into other policy-making venues such as Länder legislatures. Moreover, this oligopoly remained stable during the tumultuous early years of ‘PISA shock’ because it involved the necessary actors from government, the state, and pressure participant groups (i.e., teachers’ unions). Institutions and policy frameworks – as well as the sequence and timing of
events – are vital for understanding these outcomes in Germany, because they shaped the behaviour and interests of the actors involved (more so than ideas or ideologies emerging from international organizations or political parties). These contexts facilitated the creation of a policy oligopoly prior to the punctuation in the policy equilibrium in 2001. The German case study clarifies the conditions under which a significant change in instrumental logic can occur during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium, vis-à-vis a policy oligopoly, even when conditions prior to the PISA-shock appeared unfavourable for this outcome.

The chapter is divided into seven sections, this introduction being the first. Section Two contextualizes the education policy status quo, by providing a condensed history of German education and the institutions involved in educational policy-making, as well as more historical factors such as economic and demographic change. This section explains how actors’ interests and behaviours, as well as how they learned about new ideas in education, were strongly influenced by political institutions and past policy. Section Three describes how German education policy changed during the punctuation in the equilibrium, between late 2001 and 2006. It examines the technical and social dimensions of a significant change in evaluation instruments, and why these constituted a managed reform of German education policy. The fourth and fifth sections present the heart of the argument about how a policy oligopoly resulted in managed reform. Section Four describes how this policy oligopoly emerged, and then provides evidence that there was indeed an educational policy oligopoly within the KMK, elucidating its structure, policy image and stability properties. Section Five discusses the effects of a policy oligopoly, demonstrating that a policy oligopoly can manage reforms agendas and cause policy change vis-à-vis the mechanism of framing, obviating any reorientation of the aims of education or the need to move the debate over policy design into other arenas. The sixth section discusses how the suggested relationship between an oligopoly and managed reform compares to alternative explanations.
for instrument change. The chapter concludes with a summation of the empirical findings in Germany, and discusses the implications of this case for the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework.

3.2 Historical Background

In this section, I situate the punctuation in the policy equilibrium within a broader historical and institutional context, establishing the antecedent conditions for Germany: an insulating state, political ambiguity inherent to education policy, and acute external pressure. This section also describes the political and policy status quo, because the ideologies, preferences and behaviour of policy-making actors must be understood in terms of their institutional and policy environments, not just ‘PISA-shock’. I examine how federalism and neo-corporatism created a constellation of formal and informal veto players in this policy area, and how this political context established rules and norms which determined which actors mattered and how they strategized to achieve their preferences. I then provide a brief overview of the educational policy context in Germany, and how a well-entrenched structure and culture of German education established the policy status quo. Third, I describe a broader historical context in which the sequence and timing of events ‘external’ to German education created pressure for policy change. Finally, I look at the education policy area most susceptible to change: that of evaluation policy and governance of quality assurance. To sum up, political and social institutions ensured that the KMK was the critical venue for national educational policy-making, in the historical moment when the policy equilibrium was disrupted. These larger institutions facilitated the opportunity for a sectoral policy-making institution to manage the reform agenda.

3.2.1 Political Context: The Structure and Culture of German (Educational) Policy-making

As with many aspects of German politics, the key structural and cultural features of educational policy-making were established during the aftermath of the Second World War and then consolidated over time. To ensure that the circumstances which led to the Nazification of education would never recur, the 1949 Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany decentralized policy-making for education and
culture, conferring this right to the Länder. Due to collective memories of inter-war economic instability that lead to the rise of National Socialism, West Germany institutionalized a neo-corporatist, consultative policy-making environment intended to mitigate social conflict which might arise from adverse economic conditions.\textsuperscript{77} German education politics, much like German politics in general, involved a decentralization and diffusion of state power.

3.2.1.1 The Structure of Education Politics: Collaborative Federalism

Policy-making power was exceptionally decentralized in the field of education and collaborative federalism ensured that the formal veto players for German education were the Länder governments.\textsuperscript{78} To facilitate national cooperation in these sectors, a horizontal coordinating body was created in 1948 called the \textit{Kultusministerkonferenz} (KMK), and was composed of the Ministers of Education and Culture (plus support staff) from each of the sixteen Länder. Thus, a \textit{national} policy agenda for education could be generated by two types of organizations: organizations that coordinated policy across the Länder, such as the KMK, or organizations operating at the level of the Bund, such as the Federal Ministry of

\textsuperscript{77} In neo-corporatism, the government perceives their role not as director of the economy, but rather as referee and underwriter of ‘social contracts’ between capital and labour, designed to reduce the risk of labour strife and wage inflation (Judt 2005, 329–30). This neo-corporatist culture pervaded the political economy of West Germany, in both the private and the public sector.

\textsuperscript{78} Collaborative federalism is distinct from other forms of federalism in that it contains both cooperative and competitive elements. Aspects of cooperation included clear (horizontal) divisions of power mixed with limited overlapping responsibilities which would require policy coordination. Competition between jurisdictions also shaped local policy design decisions, such as with wage differentials for teachers or attracting the best students to local universities (see Katzenstein 1987, 330–33). In the late 1960s, a federal coalition between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) pushed for substantial policy change in a number of federal policy areas, including education. This was defeated by ‘interlocking politics’, in which political bargaining between Länder governments and policy specialists (in the federal bureaucracy) led to equal distribution of Bund resources amongst Länder (irrespective of size), blocking of any redistribution of these resources, and vague goals for national policy programs. For collaborative federalism, consensus formation is less about problem solving – or even bargaining for that matter – and more about conflict avoidance (see Katzenstein 1987, 53). These patterns differ from the ‘reform backlogs’, ‘joint decision traps’, and ‘lowest common denominator’ policies which emerge from the bicameral structure of federal government (Scharpf 2006). However, many of the policy change outcomes are similar, because policy-makers strategically coordinated policy only when they had shared or overlapping objectives (Der Bundesminister fuer Bildung und Wissenschaft 1970; Katzenstein 1987). In short, the policy status quo is also predominant for educational collaborative federalism.
Education and Research [Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)]. However, Bund-level organizations could do little more than propose ideas, and were relatively toothless when it came to imposing preferences or blocking policy. Länder autonomy was a constitutional prerogative which left the Federal Government [Bund] without an educational mandate, nor a bureaucratic structure for implementing policy.

Länder Education Ministers met four times a year in the KMK to coordinate education policies, yet between the 1970s and 1990s, they were at an ideological impasse. Early on, the KMK were somewhat successful in coordinating policies through formal agreements, but by the mid-1970s, much of the policy harmonization in the KMK had become superficial. During the 1970s, the West German Länder began to cohere into two ideological ‘camps’. The ‘A-Länder’ were more progressive in their policy preferences, championing equity over excellence and defending comprehensive schooling intended to socially integrate students. A-Länder tended to be governed by coalitions dominated by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), were located in the north and west of Germany, and faced the most budgetary austerity. A de facto leader of the A-Länder was North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), the most populous and politically influential amongst the SPD-led Länder. The ‘B-Länder’ were more

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79 The BMBF had more competencies in research than educational planning, as well as greater influence over other sectors of education, such as vocational and post-secondary. The national parliament (the Bundestag) and the national representative assembly for the Länder (the Bundesrat) were not significant actors in education policy-making. There was an institutional space created to bring the Bund and Länder together, called the Bund-Länder Commission for Education Planning and Research Funding (Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung (BLK)). It was formed in 1970 and adopted a comprehensive national education plan in 1973, but by the early 1980s this plan was abandoned and they pivoted to conducting educational research, primarily directed by the BMBF. By the 1990s, Länder policy-makers considered the BLK ineffectual (Schweitzer interview 2014) and it was dissolved with the 2006 federalism reform agreement.

80 Examples of policy coordination in the KMK included the 1955 Düsseldorf Agreement, and the Hamburg Agreements of 1964 and 1971, which facilitated inter-Land mobility yet also flexible school structures. Between 1971 and 1997, the Ministers formally agreed to little of significance within the KMK, and the only binding commitments were ‘maintenance’ policies to ensure minimum congruence between the Länder. Legally, the Ministers were not compelled to accept national policy developments, and significant policy initiatives did not reach the national agenda for fear of veto by the Länder.

81 This group also included the city states and, after 1990, many of the former East German Länder. Discussions with a number of sub-national civil servants revealed the reasons for these alignments. Hamburg and Bremen were early aware of the profound challenges their education systems were facing, particularly in terms of high dropout
conservative in their policy preferences, endorsed excellence rather than equity, and defended stratified school structures. B-Länder tended to be governed by coalitions dominated by the Christian Democratic Party (CDU), were located in the south of Germany, and faced less budgetary austerity. The de facto leader of the B-Länder was Bavaria. There were differences within the ideological camps – indeed there were sixteen veto players – but much of the national policy stagnation between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s was due to ideological disagreements between A- and B-Länder over key aspects of compulsory schooling. Thus, the KMK became an arena for minimal coordination rather than consensus and agreement over policy agendas.

The scenario above was further complicated by local context: each Land Minister dealt with local actors of varying power. Major policy initiatives were approved by the Minister-President of every Land (often assumed because the Education Minister served in the cabinet of the Minister-President), and required legislation from the representative assembly (the Landtag). The Land legislature could be a veto point if the government refused to pander somewhat to local interests. At one end of the ‘local appeasement’ spectrum was North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), where the Minister needed some buy-in from municipalities and local unions to ensure that policy implementation was possible (Zymek interview 2014). On the other end of this spectrum was Bavaria, where power was relatively centralized and concentrated. It would be an exaggeration to claim that local actors were veto players at the

rates and educational inequality, and thus ideologically aligned themselves with the A-Länder. They were also small and nimble enough to be innovation incubators – in a sense, the Hamburger Education Ministry was a policy entrepreneur and early advocates of evidence-based policy-making for evaluation policies (Vieluf interview 2013; Zymek interview 2014). Some Eastern Länder, such as Brandenburg, remained proponents of comprehensive schools and were encouraged by their post-reunification education rehabilitation ‘partnership’ with North Rhine-Westphalia to align with the A-Länder (Kuhn interview 2014). Other Eastern Länder, such as Saxony, were partnered with Baden-Württemberg and had more dynamic (urban) economies, so they gravitated more to the ideological preferences of the B-Länder (Anon 6 interview 2014).

82 The Christian Social Party (CSU) – the Bavarian counterpart to the CDU – controlled the Landtag and dominated Bavarian politics for decades. CSU governments seldom depended on civil society actors or other levels of government for policy support, but did consult groups on an ad hoc basis. For example, the Bavarian Education Ministry had close connections with the Stiftung Bildungspakt Bayern, a public-private enterprise comprising the Ministry and 140 employer and business associations (Anon 8 interview 2014; Anon 9 interview 2014).
national level, but the Minister would consider their interests (to a varying degree) during policy design discussions in the KMK.

3.2.1.2 The Culture of Education Politics: Neo-corporatism and Pressure Participants

A consultative culture existed between Länder governments and education stakeholders (including municipalities, employer associations and teacher groups). This political culture was also somewhat manifest at the national level during the 1990s, yet only for those educational stakeholders who had sufficient leverage at both the national and sub-national level – effectively, this meant teachers’ groups alone. Seldom did other groups have regular and meaningful access to government, either because they were weak (such as parents’ associations and students’ associations) or because their access was typically through Bund ministries or legislators alone (employer associations; trade unions). Teachers’ groups were the only corporate actor with meaningful (yet informal) veto power, inasmuch as they strategized to block policy by influencing official decision-makers via lobbying or strikes. The norms of neo-corporatism shaped education policy in Germany, but did not formally structure it.

While teacher representation was moderately strong, it was also fragmented. The tripartite structure of schooling in Germany resulted in highly stratified teacher unionism, with teacher groups emerging from each school type. The largest and most powerful was the Education and Science Union [Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft] (GEW) representing approximately 23% of the educational

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83 No other corporate actors had reliable access to policy-making fora, nor any systematic capacity to exercise an informal veto of education policies emerging from government. Students’ associations were nationally and regionally weak, and in some cases non-existent at the Länder level. Parents’ associations often aligned to teachers’ associations (based on school-type), but these association were typically neglected by policy-makers. Parents (and later, students) typically exercised their power locally, by sitting on the various types of school councils that aided in the daily operations of schooling.

84 For public education, teachers are state employees, and the state is both employer and underwriter of the social contract. The government does not simply coordinate and manage relationships between employers and employees, as it does in other sectors of the economy affected by neo-corporatism. Furthermore, teachers are a special type of interest group. They are ‘status-based’ (like physicians and farmers) rather than ‘class-based’ (like business associations or labour unions). As such, teachers have no institutionalized opposition (except the state itself, although neo-corporatism tended to instill cooperation with the state). Teachers also had fewer political resources, one of which was a claim of expertise (Katzenstein 1987).
workforce across all school types, but with particularly strong representation in primary school. The second most powerful was the German Philological Association [Deutscher Philologenverband] (DPhV), representing approximately 12% of the workforce, almost exclusively in Gymnasium secondary schools (Nikolai, Briken, and Niemann 2017). Although there were other teacher groups (specific to other school types), a kind of dualism between these two groups emerged during the postwar period as each group aligned itself to a different umbrella employee association. The GEW was organized like a traditional trade union, and aligned with the Confederation of German Trade Unions [Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund] (DGB) – representing the working class with a social democratic political agenda. The DPhV was aligned with the German Civil Service Foundation [Deutscher Beamtenbund und Tarifunion] (DBB), who represented civil servants (Ebbinghaus, Armingeon, and Hassel 2000; Nikolai, Briken, and Niemann 2017). Teacher representation was thus highly stratified, yet revolved around a dualism between two peak associations: The Education and Science Union (GEW) representing teacher unionism, and the German Philological Association (DPhV) representing teacher associations. In parallel to the ideological division between A- and B-Länder, these groups were likewise divided. The DPhV were ostensibly organized around conditions of learning, predominantly in favour of the status quo, and generally represented by the B-Länder. The GEW were ostensibly organized around conditions of labour, predominantly in favour of structural reform, and generally represented by the A-Länder. All teachers had a common interest in more resources (teachers, support staff, or training) or better employment conditions (such as more preparation time). As long as there was no redistribution that would leave their group worse off, all teachers’ groups advocated for these things, especially after PISA.

Teachers’ associations, and specifically the DPhV, were able to influence education policy using lobbying strategies and consultation, as they did not have the right to strike due to their special status as
civil servants [Beamten]. The DPhV advocated for educational excellence and merit-based achievement rather than integration, equity, or equality of educational outcomes (Deutscher Lehrerverbandes 2012; Deutscher Philologenverband n.d.). The DPhV was in favour of (high) educational standards and increased teacher professionalization, and were initially critical of PISA. However, if educational standards recognized (and retained) differences between school-types, and did not infringe on their ‘academic freedom’ (or material interests), then the DPhV could accept them in principle. Although they could not strike, the German Philological Association could successfully defend stratified schooling – and the Gymnasium especially – by mobilizing educated elites (amongst parents and legislators alike) and by lobbying governments privately (especially in more sympathetic B-Länder).

For the largest teachers’ union, the Education and Science Union (GEW), the primary avenue of influence was the right to strike, which could be a powerful threat considering their size and alliances. The GEW was a national body of approximately 272,000 members, although autonomous sub-national associations were more powerful in particular Land, especially NRW. Optimizing conditions of labour for teachers and educational staff was the raison d’être for the GEW, yet they also had strong policy preferences because they could argue that students’ conditions of learning were also teachers’ conditions of labour (such as class size and so on). The GEW wished for more integrative and inclusive schools (i.e., less and later stratification), equal pay and status for all classes of teachers, smaller class sizes, and expanded school hours (GEW n.d.). They had to be wary about when and where to push for

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85 Beamten status is a concept that dates to the 18th century and applied to many public professions who must uphold state laws and exercise official duties without corruption or political prejudice, such as teaching state-approved curricula. Beamten cannot go on strike, but they also receive special status and privileges. In 2009, 75.1% of teaching staff and other personnel employed in the school sector had Beamten status.

86 The relationship between the Bavarian Ministry of Education and the DPhV was not merely consultative, it was socialized: a civil servant in the Ministry suggested that members of the DPhV disproportionately took up administrative positions in the Ministry (Anon 10 interview 2014).

87 Early on, the GEW opposed international assessments – and national standards for that matter – because these threatened to create additional burdens rather than resources for teachers, and could potentially be used to justify demotions or terminations of individual teachers.
these preferences, due to moderate opposition to these types of reforms among politicians, parents and other teachers, in B-Länder especially. However, in A-Länder, the threat of strike remained palpable.

The Education and Science Union did not have the power to design policy according to their own preferences, nor formally veto national policies agreed to within the KMK, but could motivate A-Länder governments – NRW especially – to hear their concerns.\footnote{A former GEW executive told me that they initially had more clout with the BMBF. However, this leverage was seldom useful for influencing policy outcomes, and so they actively cultivated access to the KMK through A-Länder governments (Anon 13 interview 2014). With these governments, the GEW negotiated their members’ conditions of labour via collective agreements, and had the right to withhold labour (of non-Beamten members) if an agreement could not be reached. The GEW could also mobilize their trade union brethren in the DGB, although this was more often for moral and logistical support, because the threat of a general strike was seldom supported (especially at the national level). Furthermore, the GEW could garner some support among parents’ and students’ associations, although this was less reliable (and less powerful) than solidarity with trade unions. Notably, parental support for the GEW has been waning in NRW and elsewhere over time, as access to the Gymnasium has steadily increased (from 9\% in 1970 to 38\% in 2009). Given the opportunity to enroll their own children in Gymnasium, more and more parents are expressing less and less support for GEW policy preferences (see Nikolai, Briken, and Niemann 2017, 124).}

\textit{The Structure and Culture of Education Politics: ‘Semi-sovereign’ State Actors}

A general lack of governing authority in Germany has been dubbed the ‘semi-sovereign state’ by Peter Katzenstein (1987). According to Katzenstein, (West) German state power had been ‘tamed’ by a well-organized (and centralized) civil society, and tempered by multiple levels and jurisdictions of government. This not only curbed the policy ambitions of governments, it eroded the policy design capacity of state actors within permanent bureaucracies. While there was regional variance in infrastructural power, educational bureaucracies were generally compliant actors, implementing the policy agendas of others rather than innovating their own. On one hand this was due to structural weaknesses in educational governance, such as the need for redundancy (i.e., the duplication of governance across sixteen Länder) as well as the distributional effects of a general lack of investment.\footnote{Not only did Germany spend less on education than the OECD average, they also skewed that spending towards teachers rather than administration. A German secondary school teacher earned the equivalent of US$68,619 per annum, while teachers with commensurate experience in America earned US$48,000, in Finland US$49,237 and France US$36,145. The OECD average was US$43,711 (see OECD 2011). There is comparatively little in the way of middle management in German educational bureaucracies.}
On the other, this was due to cultural suspicion of state apparatuses in post-war Germany, manifest in the development of para-public institutions to substitute or supplement state functions. For education policy, being a ‘semi-sovereign state’ meant that bureaucratic actors were neither agenda-setters nor informal veto players, and needed outside experts to assist them in designing and implementing policy.

The structural and cultural features of German education politics created a large constellation of formal and informal veto players, which made significant policy change seem unlikely. There was, however, a broad congruence of interests and values between two camps, one of which aligned the policy preferences of the A-Länder with the Education and Science Union (GEW), and the other which aligned the B-Länder with the German Philological Association (DPhV). If, somehow, agreement could be found between the two larger camps, then the semi-sovereign state would not stand in the way of reform. However, these institutions appeared capable of perpetuating the status quo indefinitely, and might have done, but for the emergence a sector-specific institution for policy design prior to a very public ‘external’ shock to the system (PISA).

3.2.2 Policy Context: The Structure and Culture of German Education Systems

If the politics of German education could be dated from the postwar era, then the policies which shaped German education systems had a much older pedigree. Many of the core features of German educational paradigm had developed in the 19th century, with certain aspects consolidated during the

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90 Called ‘intermediary institutions’ by de Tocqueville, these organizations are a heterogeneous group which serve to bridge the gap between the public and private sectors, and are a trademark of an oligopolistic style of politics where the state was neither central nor peripheral (Katzenstein 1987, 80). Para-public institutions are characterized by a high degree of autonomy in policy implementation or design (under the general supervision of the state), a high level of expertise, and typically operate out of the public limelight. They often function as ‘shock-absorbers’ in the political system, depoliticizing controversial policy areas by turning them into areas of technical and administrative expertise – a prime example being the politically-independent Central Bank of Germany (Busch 2005; Katzenstein 1987, 58–80). In education, there had been no national para-public institutions since the collapse of the German Education Council in 1975, although Länder bureaucracies occasionally consulted regional foundations or think tanks. The period of 1998–2004 saw the development of a number of national para-public institutions for education (such as the IQB).
immediate post-war era of Keynesian social welfare. From this tradition emerged the national educational philosophy (*Bildung*), the principle itself evolving over the course of the 20th century. By the 1960s, (West) German education had become highly-stratified, secular, decentralized, mass-based, and publicly-provided (Ansell and Lindvall 2013; Baldi 2010). From this policy legacy, policy-makers during the 1990s had formed their core beliefs and policy preferences, and understood their interests in relation to this policy status quo.

3.2.2.1 Culture of German Education: ‘Bildung’

*Bildung* is a malleable idea used to justify abstract policy goals in German education, as well as to rationalize a non-interventionist role for government. The philosophies behind German education pre-date Germany as a nation-state, and so perhaps it is no surprise that *Bildung* was traditionally intended as the means to transmit culture rather than for political socialization or vocational training.91 Although there has been no single, universally-accepted definition for *Bildung*, inter-subjective meanings typically refer to the development of individual character as well as understanding the national culture (Döbert, Klieme, and Sroka 2004c, 298–99). Yet *Bildung* has not been a static ideal. Broader geopolitical events occasionally penetrated this discourse, causing education policy-makers to reflect on the abstract aims of German education. The 1957 ‘Sputnik shock’ saw many politicians in Western countries reconsider their systems of education and research, West Germany included.92 Reunification in the early 1990s was

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91 “There is a misconception about *Bildung* having contrasting ideas. One camp emphasized personal character, the development of the person, the learning of culture, and so on. This camp was concerned about *Bildung* being undermined by PISA testing: Literacy as a competence (in the PISA sense) is not the type of literacy that *Bildung* is meant to capture. However, the other camp – people like Tienort – pointed out that such black and white distinctions are inaccurate. *Bildung* also means preparing individuals to be self-sufficient in the economy” (Tillman interview 2013).

92 The ‘Sputnik shock’ or ‘Sputnik crisis’ refers to feelings of anxiety in the USA and other Western countries due to a perceived technological gap between them and the USSR, after the Soviets were the first to successfully launch an unmanned probe into space. In Germany, Georg Picht’s 1964 book, ‘The Educational Catastrophe’, triggered a broad debate about the failings of West German education systems. Picht argued that German innovation – as well as its export-driven manufacturing economy – was hindered by low per capita spending on education, low graduation rates, urban/rural inequality, issues of equal access in the tripartite system, and low rates of post-secondary participation. Many of these issues were ignored, with policy-makers choosing to focus on post-
also a shock for German education, if only for the Eastern Länder. However, these occasional shocks only ended up suppressing debates over educational structure, spending, or centralization of policy-making. German education was modernized in terms of curriculum and access, yet by the mid-1970s, the governance, structures and funding of schooling had stabilized to an equilibrium similar to before the 1970s.

3.2.2.2 Structure of German Education: Tripartite Schooling

Amongst the core features of an education system, the aspect that most distinguishes German education from other countries is its ‘differentiated school system’, characterized by early stratification. Upon completion of primary school [Grundschule] at the age of ten (twelve in some Länder), German pupils are segregated into different educational tracks, either academic or vocational. The five- (or six-) year Hauptschule was the ‘lowest’ academic track, often leading to a terminal qualification at lower secondary level, and either to an apprenticeship program or (more likely) straight into the labour market. The ‘middle’ track was via the six-year Realschule to achieve an intermediate qualification secondary enrollment, and increased educational access for underprivileged demographics such as the symbolic ‘Kunstfigur’ (Catholic, working-class women from the countryside: see Helbig and Schneider 2014).

The 1990 Treaty of Unification obliged the five new Länder in East Germany to re-organize their education systems by June of 1991, a process assisted by ‘partnerships’ between individual Länder in the East and West. East Germany had developed along a different educational track for more than forty years, yet rather than perceive this as an opportunity for comparison or learning, reunification was taken as evidence of the superiority of West German education. A prominent federal politician very active in education politics at the time admitted that reunification ‘ossified’ West German educational structures and governance mechanisms, and it was not until the late 1990s that some West German policy-makers began to reflect on opportunities for lesson-drawing (Anon 14 interview 2014).

Policies during the 1960s and 1970s made higher tracks and levels of education accessible to marginal groups like the Kunstfigur, supporting an important principle of Bildung – equality of opportunity. Furthermore, the ‘massification’ of secondary education served Germany’s manufacturing-intensive economy by activating more of society into the labour market, primarily through vocational education pathways. Yet the tripartite school structure also acted as a ‘safety valve’ against true massification. Instead of providing an idealized – and arguably useless – ‘academic’ secondary education to all members of society, Bildung could now be interpreted in light of recently-published human capital theory. Human capital theory emphasized the importance of education as a training mechanism for the labour market, which could increase individual and societal prosperity (Becker 1964). Thus, education could be an engine for economic growth and prosperity, alongside improvements to capital or labour productivity. The Bund made fledgling investments in structural reforms and educational governance mechanisms, such as the 1965 German Educational Council (later the BLK), but the lasting reforms that emerged from the 1960s were more curricular than they were structural.
[Mittlere Reife], which typically led to further vocational training with an apprenticeship or entry into a course at a polytechnic or ‘applied’ university [Fachhochschule]. The ‘highest’ academic track was the nine-year (now predominantly eight-year) Gymnasium that prepared students to write exams for an Abitur, a leaving certificate which guaranteed access to university. In theory, students could move between the school tracks, but in practice, decisions made during the orientation phase at the end of Grundschule were rarely overturned. Students would often be ‘locked-in’ to an educational pathway by ten (or twelve) years of age. In terms of pedagogy, the principle for segregated or stratified schooling is one of homogenizing learning groups. The early separation of students based on academic ability optimizes opportunities for each group – the most able are not held back by slow learners, and slower learners can proceed at a pace appropriate for their (collective) needs. Stratified schooling was something of an artifact from the 19th century (i.e., prior to the ‘massification’ of secondary schooling), yet persisted as the key structural feature that continues to define German education today.

The tripartite education system also became an ideological battleground amongst academics, educational experts, teachers’ groups, and Ministries in the A- and B-Länder. The 1955 Düsseldorf Agreement (in the KMK) secured the right for Länder to ‘defect’ from differentiated schooling if they wished, although the tripartite structure continued to dominate all West German education systems. Following the 1971 Hamburg Agreement (KMK), some Länder started experimenting with comprehensive schools [Gesamtschulen] which integrated students of all academic ability into one

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95 During the 1980s, educational researchers from other countries praised the German duales (apprenticeship) system which integrated classroom lessons with on-the-job training in firms. This system was cost effective because the firms carried some of the costs, and was presumed to better integrate young people into the labour market. Other countries’ (unsuccessful) attempts to model the duales system only served to reinforce the idea that German education was superior. This praise, however, glossed over other demographic trends undermining the tripartite school structure. Fewer students from Hauptschule were going on to apprenticeships and further training, and there was a growing aversion amongst parents to allow their children into the lowest track. The Hauptschule came to be known colloquially as the ‘Restschule’ – the school for the ‘remainders’ – and outside of Bavaria it was assiduously avoided by German families with any cultural capital. By the 1990s, Hauptschulen were disproportionally populated by the children of recent immigrants and other socio-economically disadvantaged groups, and few teachers were enthusiastic about careers in them.
learning environment. The development of Gesamtschulen was much more pronounced in A-Länder, and indeed, much of the ideological division between A- and B-Länder developed during the 1970s over integrated or differentiated schooling. This ‘battle for ideas’ – i.e., whether a comprehensive or tripartite school structure afforded the best opportunities for students – became the backdrop for how political actors defined their interests as educational stakeholders.

Innovations on school structure were not forthcoming from educational bureaucracies in the Länder. Consistent with the concept of the semi-sovereign state, the provision of education had long been considered a public responsibility, but not one in which governments invested much time or money. On one hand, the state had progressively squeezed out many civil society actors; aside of the apprenticeship system, few private actors were involved in public education systems since the retreat of the church in the 19th century (Martens and Weymann 2007; Wolf 2006). On the other, while state provision was assumed, governments were not especially politically involved in German education until the late 20th century. Although differentiated schooling was inefficient to operate in terms of administration and infrastructure (even the buildings had to be separate), schooling as a social institution trumped government ‘meddling’ such as cost rationalization. Bildung was a cultural feature of German education used to justify disparate educational aims and different school-types, yet also used to argue for minimal government ‘interference’ in the autonomy of education systems.

3.2.3 Historical Context: External Pressure and the Importance of Timing and Cumulation

Broader economic, social and political trends served as a backdrop for the punctuation in the German educational policy equilibrium. The PISA shock came at a time of economic and demographic rendition in Germany, along with pressure from other policy areas. By the late 1990s, the German economy was

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96 Germany remained one of the lowest education spenders amongst OECD countries (in 2002, the average across 21 OECD countries was 5.22%). In 2002, Germany spent only 4.4% of its GDP on public education, an average of €4200 per student spent for general education schools and €3100 per student in vocational schools (Statistisches Bundesamt 2002).
dubbed ‘the sick man of Europe’, with stagnant GDP growth as well as high and rising unemployment (Dustmann et al. 2014, 167). Concurrently, an ageing population meant fewer school-age children were being taught by an older – and increasingly expensive – cohort of teachers. Add to this a number of related policy areas making new demands of the education system, and it became clear that education systems were expected to help alleviate socio-economic problems – despite mounting demographic (and budgetary) stressors – by ensuring that German students were well-prepared to enter the new knowledge economy.97 However, it was not clear to policy-makers how education systems might go about doing this because there was no clear definition of the problems, never mind unambiguous policy solutions. Notwithstanding the timing of these other ‘external’ trends, they had little impact on the actual design of educational reforms (Schweitzer interview 2014). They merely generated greater uncertainty regarding appropriate policy design.

When PISA 2000 results were released to the public in December 2001, the results – and the ranking especially -- shocked the German public, politicians and press. Germany ranked 21st in mathematics and science, and 22nd in reading, with overall test PISA scores well below the OECD average. However, this was not the shock that initiated discussions of reform amongst educational ‘insiders’. Indeed, one need only look at the disparity between PISA ‘prescriptions’ and the actual policy outputs in Germany to be aware that new policies were being designed prior to the release of PISA.98

97 Compulsory education was also under pressure from developments in higher education, welfare state policies, and commitments to the EU. In 1998, the Federal Minister for Education Jürgen Rüttgers signed the Sorbonne Declaration, committing Germany to adapt its system of higher education to a common frame of reference with other European states (later known as the Bologna Process). Then in early 2000, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder committed Germany to the EU’s Lisbon Agenda, an economic strategy to make the EU “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world” by 2010 (European Council 2000). Finally, in February 2002, Schröder established the Committee for Modern Services in the Labour Market [Kommission für moderne Dienstleistungen am Arbeitsmarkt] – the ‘Hartz Committee’ – which would go on to recommend reductions in social welfare benefits, putting greater pressure on schools to ensure the employability of its graduates.

98 The OECD did not prescribe a specific set of policies to optimize education, because PISA – like other comparative assessments – provides a descriptive snapshot of education systems rather than a clear picture of the mechanisms that cause educational shortcomings. That said, PISA did proffer a model of what a ‘high-performing’ education system should look like, and suggested that national Ministries consider how they might emulate this. However, a former labour leader-turned-politician informed me that Länder Ministers were wary of the OECD, that
Rather, PISA results made clear that previous assumptions about the high quality of German education were misplaced: in the words of one KMK official: “there was a disconnect between self-image and reality” (Anon 3 interview 2014). Many policy community insiders knew this already. In 1995, for the first time since the 1970s, Germany participated in an international comparative assessment: The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). When the results of this assessment were released in 1997, it demonstrated (against expectation) that German students had performed below the international average in math and sciences. Small shockwaves rippled through educational policy communities, as administrators and researchers discussed the veracity and implications of TIMSS. It was this ‘TIMSS shock’ that began the reform discussion inside the policy community, and paved the way for international and national comparisons such as PISA-I in 2001 and PISA-E in 2002.99 Indeed, prominent experts suggested that if not for the ‘internal’ TIMSS shock, the PISA shock (and policy-making episode) would not have been possible (Klemm interview 2013; Anon 5 interview 2014). In short, cumulative effects mattered. Successive iterations of disconfirming evidence ‘softened up’ this policy area and sowed seeds of doubt amongst policy practitioners. This is not to say that iterative disconfirming evidence is a necessary condition nor social learning the key mechanism for the type of reform we saw in Germany. Rather, the accumulation of international comparative assessments mattered for context:

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99 This ‘TIMSS shock’, however, received scant attention outside of educational policy communities. PISA was also shocking for the policy community because it translated data into an international ranking, and provided evidence not previously revealed by TIMSS such as the strong correlation in Germany between social background and educational achievement. Furthermore, PISA was considered more legitimate by some because of its methodology the reputation of the OECD. Most critically, PISA caught the attention of the media, the public, and elected politicians in Germany.
the TIMSS shock put pressure on the policy community to consider new policy designs, later reflected in
the reforms made by Education Ministers during PISA shock.

3.2.4 The Status Quo: Quality Assurance in German Education

The Logic of Evaluation

Among the problems illuminated by international comparisons was the modes of assessment, as the
regulatory logic of quality assurance had assumed rather than externally evaluated the quality of
German education. Quality assurance mechanisms were oriented towards educational inputs, and
functioned according to the logic of a ‘regulatory program’ (Baumert and MPIB 1994). However, the
thinness of educational bureaucracies in the Länder (and no national evaluative body) meant that
quality assurance regimes lacked robust assessment mechanisms and were weakly enforced. A basic
accounting of arbitrary outputs (such as the numbers of Abitur diplomas awarded per year) was little
help in evaluating the quality of the system or the learning process. Moreover, credentials and school-
types were markedly different from one Länder to the next (even if the nomenclature was shared),
rendering any national-level quality assurance effectively meaningless. Ministries of Education across
Germany merely assumed that they were providing high quality education according to the abstract
aims purported in the various Education Acts or ministerial decrees. Thus, it came as a shock that
perhaps German education was not of the highest quality, and that poor measurement and governance
was partly to blame.

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100 Essentially, there were regulatory policies covering evaluation (such as school inspections), but much of
schooling remained a ‘black box’. Beginning from parliamentary acts or ministerial decrees, Länder Ministries
would regulate provision of staff, materials and financing, as well as provide guidelines regarding school curricula.
Regulatory instruments, such as pro forma reports from school inspectors or mechanisms measuring only inputs
and credentials, were the minimum needed to monitor an education system. In many respects, when the
classroom door was closed, the state had little knowledge of what occurred inside. Ministers tended to maintain
this status quo because it was politically expedient to remain out of the public eye: evaluation policies seemed
successful enough (at least amongst the ‘voting classes’).
Forms of Evaluation Policy, and Implications

Among the many ‘under-governed’ aspects of German education, quality assurance was perhaps the thinnest. In practice, evaluation policy entailed quality control of students or curricula, rather than quality assurance of teaching, schools, or education systems. Tracking outputs like credentials or grades were at best a summative assessment of student knowledge, and could not provide objective information about whether education prepared students for the next stage in their lives, or valid data about the quality of teaching, schools, or systems as a whole. At the system level, monitoring was almost non-existent: Germany had not engaged in national or international comparative assessments for decades, and ‘domestic’ educational experts conducted little in the way of robust empirical research. School-level assessment was also underdeveloped: School administrators lacked authority and management-training, and school inspectorates did not have the capacity to influence school management or teacher behaviour. Only at the level of teacher evaluation was there an increasing awareness that teacher-training programs required assessment and quality assurance, out of recognition that teaching was too didactic, content-driven, and lacked sufficient practical component.

101 Quality assurance and development was so low a priority in some Länder that they had even de-funded their ministerial quality assurance agencies [Landesinstituts] during the 1990s. North Rhine-Westphalia was one such Land that did this, and the NRW Ministry of Education did not re-establish its Landesinstitut until 2013.
102 Research was narrowly confined to departments of education, as academic research on didactics and pedagogical practice. Furthermore, it often reflected the philosophical or ideological commitments of the researcher. Where systemic evaluation was sanctioned or funded by the state, these were sporadic comparative studies conducted between a handful of ‘like-minded’ Länder. These qualitative assessments of pedagogical techniques or curriculum which were neither systematic, nor critical ‘assessment of assessments’.
103 School principals were often little more than head teachers (i.e., former teachers who had reached their position without specialized training and with little de facto authority over other teachers in their schools). The role of the inspectorate varied across Länder, yet the ubiquitous aspect was that teacher supervision was regulatory rather than formative. Inspectors might have wanted to support school and teacher quality, but most of their time was devoted to ensuring that legal and administrative provisions were observed and that instruction corresponded to the didactic and content-specific requirements of a given subject (Burkhard 2001, 151). Thus, inspections were usually pro forma, taking place at particular career stages in order to qualify for advancement. Most Länder attempted to reform school administration and the inspectorates during the 1990s – a common approach was the introduction of a ‘school program’ [Schulprogram] which would increase school autonomy and link internal to external evaluation – yet much stayed the same because inspectors and principals had no more actual power over teachers than they did before the introduction of a school program.
However, systematic efforts to improve teacher-training across Germany were muted until the early 2000s. Because they used the tripartite school structure as a quality control mechanism and only regulated educational inputs, the Länder perpetuated a localized regulatory logic of assessment, with nothing to assure quality at the national level. The chief implication of this lack of quality assurance was that governance was regulatory, but insufficient to actually regulate behaviour in schools.

3.2.5 Conclusions from Historical Background

Despite cumulative external pressure from socio-economic factors and international comparative assessments, the institutional and political conditions of German education were not conducive to significant policy change at the national level. The Länder retained sovereign authority to make decisions about education policy, and faced little pressure from national bodies or other actors to coordinate policies or improve quality assurance. As formal veto players, Länder could cleave to their policy preferences because of an ideological divide manifest in school structure debates between the 1970s and 1990s. National principles of education [Bildung] went relatively unchallenged outside of academia, and policy-makers merely used them to justify a vague set of educational goals, such as preparing young people for society or the economy. Education systems functioned rather autonomously anyway, with the expectation that teachers and school administrators knew what they were doing, and if students failed in school or society it was due to non-systematic characteristics (i.e., merit, intelligence, and so on). External evaluation mechanisms that determined if abstract goals were actually being met remained underdeveloped, as it was assumed that the Länder Ministries could evaluate and...

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104 This area is a clear example of a reform idea ‘in the pipeline’ prior to the punctuation in the policy equilibrium. In 1995, the KMK passed resolution 813, for mutual recognition of teacher-training exams and teacher qualifications across all Länder, with guidelines for training phases. However, such mutual recognition arguably reinforced basic divisions between primary and secondary teachers that had resisted all reform during the previous 150 years. A few years later, one of the key recommendations of the Forum Bildung was to systematically reform teacher-training nation-wide by accounting for new methods, including more pre-service practice and in-service teacher-training (BLK 2001). Although the Länder did not appreciate Bund ‘meddling’ in this area, they did recognize that teacher-training had a common need for improvement.
adjust performance by tracking graduation rates and controlling system inputs. Where conditions were deteriorating, the lack of robust system-wide evaluation mechanisms meant that teachers and administrators could not be sure if the problems they saw were temporary and localized, or pervasive and systematic. Furthermore, due to the tripartite educational structure, teachers had a blame avoidance ‘safety valve’ for quality control: they could send underachieving students to a ‘lower’ stream of the school system. Teachers were largely left alone by the Länder ministries to be ‘kings of their domain’, and this autonomy, as well as the status, job security and relatively decent pay for the teaching profession, mitigated against teachers agitating for change. Yet during the years following the release of PISA in 2001, there was significant change in German education policy, if not in terms of aims and objectives, then certainly in terms of policy instruments. This is examined in the next section.

3.3 Patterns of Policy Change in Germany: Managed Reforms

Between 2001 and 2006, a managed reform led to a significant change in quality assurance policies, in lieu of profound changes to the structural features of German education or its overarching policy orientations. The objectives of Bildung remained the same – the integration of young people into German society and the labour market, whatever that might mean in a local context – yet the instruments for assuring quality in education changed profoundly. This change in instrumentation had a technical and social dimension. The technical dimension involved the creation of standards at a national level, by which educational outputs could be measured. The social dimension speaks to the way that standards affected educational governance, involving a logic of ‘governing by numbers’ (Grek 2009), and standard-setting by experts in a para-public institution, at arms length from government. In this section, I provide a brief overview of the reforms during the period after PISA was released, then focus on the technical and social dimensions of the changes to quality assurance mechanisms in Germany. The changes to evaluation policy can be summarized as a shift from a regulatory logic of input-control, to a standards-based logic which monitored and steered educational outputs.
3.3.1 The Catalogue for Action [Handlungskatalog]

Although it was the introduction of standards-based logic to evaluation policy that interests us here, there were other policies that accompanied these reforms. The so-called ‘Catalogue for Action’ contained seven action lines, only two of which were directly about evaluation and assessment. These two were important action lines for quality assurance, calling for “measures to thoroughly develop and ensure the quality of teaching and schools on the basis of binding standards and results-oriented evaluation” and “measures to improve professionalism in teaching, particularly with respect to diagnostic competence as an element of systematic school development” (Sekretariat der KMK 2001).

The other action lines signalled Germany’s commitment to a ‘social investment perspective’ in education programming (Bonoli and Natali 2012; Jenson 2012). Unlike the introduction of national standards, however, these other action lines required large investments and many years to implement, according to expert Katherin Dedering (Dedering interview 2013). The reform agenda established in 105

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105 This perspective was an extension of human capital theory, and already present in the German educational paradigm. Education was increasingly considered an investment in human capital, paying real dividends for individuals and reducing social welfare costs for societies (plus other positive externalities like innovation, important to a value-added, export-driven economy). From a social investment perspective, investments paid higher dividends if made earlier rather than later. Universities and research continued to be important for economic growth in Germany, but what appeared to be lacking was more efficient investment in early childhood education (ECE), primary schooling, and basic skills (literacy; numeracy). Five of the seven action lines thus called for measures to improve basic skills at ECE and primary, as well as amongst disadvantaged groups (especially those with a migrant background). Of these reforms, perhaps the most revolutionary was the introduction of ‘all-day-schools’ [Ganztagschulen] for primary school students.

106 In terms of time and resources to implement, the Ganztagschulen policy might be the partial exception. Arguably, this idea was borne out of the Forum Bildung – and a politician involved at the time suggested that it emanated from the actual Minister of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (Anon 14 interview 2014). Certainly, it was a policy idea supported by the Bund government, as Minister Bulmahn promised €4 billion to the Länder for the establishment and operation of Ganztagschulen. Without this Bund investment, Ganztagschulen would not have been possible, because the Länder had self-imposed a ‘debt brake’ on all their budgetary areas of responsibility in order to bring public deficits under control. Indeed, the Länder that were most favourable towards Ganztagschulen were the ones that could least afford them (such as NRW), although all Länder governments were wary of accepting Bund investment out of concern that the BMBF would want a greater say in how the money was spent. In the end, the Länder did accept Bund money for Ganztagschulen, although policy implementation remained uneven and they made sure to negotiate for reduced Bund involvement in education during the 2006 Federalism Reform. When Chancellor Angela Merkel promised another sizeable investment in 2008, this time for education research, the Länder governments could accept without duress because the Bund’s role in national education had by then been further constrained.
December 2001 included a commitment to modify the school day and redistribute resources towards primary, pre-primary and immigrant students, but the most immediate and profound changes were to policies pertaining to evaluation and quality assurance.\textsuperscript{107}

3.3.2 Technical Dimension of Instrumentation: Standard-setting

At the core of the transformation of evaluation instruments was the introduction of national standards beginning in 2002. It was not that standardization never existed before, but rather that the new instrumental logic re-conceptualized what was meant by a standard. Prior to 2002, ‘regulatory’ standards had been established at the Land-level to measure and standardize comparable inputs. Each Land’s Ministry of Education regulated curricular content, duration of teacher training, qualification exams (for teacher training; for student credentials); distribution of funding across schools or programs, and so on. The assumption was that local regulation of these inputs would standardize the factors that Education Ministries could control, and non-systematic factors (such as merit or inherent intelligence) would ultimately determine learning processes and educational outcomes. International comparative assessments like PISA challenged the assumption that comparable inputs had equivalent effects. There appeared to be factors (such as socio-economic background) that systematically affected the learning process and educational outcomes. With the implementation of standards by a national coordinating agency, educational outputs could be measured and compared, evaluating things like student or teacher competency (i.e., pedagogical skills, student numeracy and literacy, and so on). These performance or assessment standards functioned via a different logic than before – one of diagnostics and accountability. In terms of diagnostics, national assessment standards purportedly allowed for formative

\textsuperscript{107} There were other notable changes to education underway both during and after the PISA shock period, yet these reforms were not policy changes per se, or not a direct outcome of this punctuation to the policy equilibrium. One such change was the de facto reduction of school tracks such that the Hauptschule no longer has much relevance or capacity today. Retired academics and civil servants that have long observed education agreed that the causes for this institutional erosion were economic and demographic rather than the result of formal policy change: the cost of maintaining so many schools and school types coupled with fewer students overall, and the poor reputation of the Hauptschulen (Klemm interview 2013; Vieluf interview 2013).
assessments at the local level (i.e., a snapshot of competency development and not merely a summative assessment of knowledge). In terms of accountability, performance standards defined achievement on a proficiency scale that would allow system-wide comparison, and held students, schools, teachers or education systems to account vis-à-vis criteria set by technical experts. National standards were not simply the duplication of a regulatory framework at the national level, but rather, a new governance logic for quality assurance.

In practical terms, standard-setting was applied to three levels of education: systems, schools, and teacher training. At the system level, national education standards measured and oriented student learning objectives, and were eventually consolidated into a comprehensive quality assurance strategy on 2 June 2006. At the school level, assessments of student competences and skills became a proxy for evaluating school performance. In June 2002, the KMK adopted a resolution to introduce national educational standards [Bildungsstandards], and between 2003 and 2007, specific standards were set for learning outcomes in primary schooling, and for credentials in all three tracks of secondary schooling.

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108 It was not clear if educational standards (linked to competency models) would have any effect on internal school development, but it was assumed that it would. After some negotiation, the intent was to have ‘low-stakes’ testing that could be used for formative assessment of the system (and not high-stakes testing for summative assessments of individual schools or teachers). That said, the accountability dynamic does affect individual behaviour: “[s]tandards thus formulate measurable expectations towards schools and instruction and therefore make schools more accountable for the achievement of standards” (Döbert, Klieme, and Sroka 2004a, 328).

109 This national strategy [Gesamtstrategie der Kultusministerkonferenz zum Bildungsmonitoring] for system assessment had four components: 1) participation in international comparative studies of pupil achievement, underway since 1995 (TIMSS, PISA, PIRLS/IGLU, etc); 2) central review of the achievement of educational standards in a comparison between the Länder [Ländervergleich], the successor project of 2002 PISA-E tests; 3) low-stakes testing within the Länder to review the efficiency of individual schools, since 2003. These VergleichsArbeiten (VERA) tests were intended to help schools and teachers improve their teaching processes. They have been criticized because teachers do not know how to use the results, and Bavarian critics have suggested that they set expectations too low by focussing on levels of competence for a ‘typical’ German student rather than setting a higher bar (EMSE-Netzwerk 2008; Sachse 2009); 4) joint reporting on education by the Federation and the Länder. The first report was published by the KMK in 2003 [Bildungsbericht für Deutschland], with subsequent reports in 2006 and 2008 as joint efforts between the BMBF and the KMK.

110 National standards for assessment of student competency were rolled out over the course of several years (in 2003 the Hauptschulabschluss, in 2004 the Mittlere Schulabschluss, in 2007 learning outcomes for the Gymnasium were not standardized but the standards for examination conditions were (for example, exam questions for the Abitur were ‘centralized’ at Land-level). Implementation of standards was uneven, and Rhineland-Palatinate still does not have a centralized Abitur exam. Rhineland-Palatinate is also the only Land not to provide students the option of a shorter (eight-year) Gymnasiale course, the so-called ‘Turbo-Abi’. However, centralized and
These competence-based standards would also have a profound (albeit somewhat unintended) effect on curricular development. Finally, in terms of quality assurance for teaching, the KMK created a framework of teaching competencies [Standards für die Lehrerbildung: Bildungswissenschaften], which became the basis for accreditation and regular evaluation of all teacher-training courses across Germany (Sekretariat der KMK 2004). This framework was translated into national standards for pre-service teacher training (in 2004), in-service teacher training (2006), and subject-specific training (by 2008). This multi-level technical dimension to standard-setting meant that the new instrumental logic existed not just for national KMK resolutions, it also became manifest in policy and practice at the sub-national and local level, and for all major components of education.

3.3.3 Social dimension of Instrumentation: ‘Governance-by-numbers’

The logic of standard-setting also had implications for how education systems were governed. There was no fundamental change regarding the operation of schooling, which reflected the demands of the most powerful actors involved. The abstract aims of education, as well as school structures and levels of standardized exams would be the norm across all Länder and school-type by the 2005/6 school year (Klemm and van Akeren 2004).

111 The PISA Consortium insisted that standards were not meant to replace curriculum: “unlike curricula, standards do not provide guidance on teaching content, or the structure and timing of learning processes” (Klieme et al. 2003, 77f). One education administrator at Land-level concurred that PISA itself had little influence on curricular development (Anon 6 interview 2014), and a representative for teachers also suggested that teachers remained largely unaware of national standards yet very aware of curricular changes (Anon 11 interview 2014). However, competence-based standards did change how curriculum was conceived. Traditionally, curriculum provided by the Ministries was a detailed prescription of instructional aims and content, the heritage of highly didactical philosophies of education. In practice, however, prescriptive curricula were simply the basis of negotiations between teachers within each school. Textbooks were mandated by the Ministry, but teachers’ councils could interpret curriculum according to local context (Ertl 2006). Competence-based standards were an inadvertent means for the state to prescribe curriculum, as well as hold teachers to account for it. A high level civil servant in the KMK described it thus: “There have been attempts to integrate Land curriculum with national Bildungsstandards...Content is always a part of the curriculum, and this undergoes periodic change anyway...The difference is that new standards created output-orientations for curricular reforms: competences, skills, prescribed learning outcomes, and so on” (Anon 3 interview 2014). Others, such as a researcher involved in standard-setting at the IQB, have questioned the degree to which standards and curricula are being aligned: “One could hypothesize that the Länder Ministries do not want to know exactly how standards and curricula align, because then national standards would determine local curriculum. At the end of the day the Länder can always do what they want when it comes to implementing standards or setting curriculum. There are no rules or punishments for this” (Richter interview 2013).
funding, remained within the remit of the Länder, and teachers retained their status and pedagogical freedom within the classroom. Yet being held accountable for the outcomes of education would change the logic of governance significantly, such that teachers and schools became responsive to standards, and Länder Ministries of Education were no longer able to act unilaterally. External evaluations and standard-setting would shift the balance of power towards technical experts at the national level. Standards were set in the KMK and implemented by a national para-public institution, the Institute for Quality Development in Education (IQB). The IQB was a scientific advisory body established in December of 2004 which implemented (and instrumentalized) standards, monitored and conducted empirical research for the education systems, and interpreted national and international comparative assessments. Because the IQB was fully funded by the KMK and the Länder, it was responsive to their needs, yet it also gave direction to the Länder through its empirical research and technical ability to set standards. Furthermore, the IQB was comprised of independent educational experts from outside the state, whose methods were guided by peer-review, not political demands.\textsuperscript{112} The introduction of a new quality assurance framework – and a scientific agency to oversee it – shifted monitoring and steering away from the local level and towards a national agency of independent experts in the IQB. Local actors, like the Länder Ministries, were still responsible for educational operations, but educational outcomes would be accountable to national agencies: the KMK and the IQB. Regarding the social dimension of the new standards-based logic, this change consolidated the transformation of evaluation policy instruments, and created a new para-public institution to implement them.

\textsuperscript{112} The IQB is funded and takes direction from the Länder, via the general secretary of the KMK, or more often from the Amtschefskommission (Weigand 2013). One high level administrator of the IQB described its governance as if the sixteen Länder Education Ministers were a Board of Directors, approving project funding (Anon 2 interview 2014). A researcher with the IQB reported: “If [the Länder] do not want us to do a particular analysis, we cannot do it, we need to get permission to write on certain topics. The IQB does have greater power when it comes to areas that the Länder Ministries have yet to develop, such as teacher training. The IQB provides evidence for best practice when it comes to teacher qualification, and this can pressure individual Länder” (Richter interview 2014).
3.3.4 Punctuation in the Policy Equilibrium: 2001-2006

Between late 2001 and 2006, the policy commitments made by the Länder Ministers of Education created national standards for teacher training, centralized examinations, and learning outcomes at primary and secondary level. Teachers, schools and the Länder were made accountable to these standards, and thus new evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms were developed. Furthermore, a national para-public institution, the IQB, was established by the KMK in 2004 for overseeing the process of standard-setting as well as establishing the level at which standards would be set. These reforms together represent a significant change to the technical and social logic of evaluation policy in Germany. The question remains: why this form of change? Existing political and educational institutions had created seemingly unfavourable conditions for any policy change at the national level, and Land Ministries had threatened to veto previous national-level reforms. Policy models proffered by international organizations pressured formal veto players in Germany to consider even more radical changes, but that appeared to be a non-starter. What was it about the policy agenda during this punctuation in the policy equilibrium that allowed for this type of policy change, no more and no less?

3.4 Evidence of a National Policy Oligopoly

The core argument of this dissertation concerns the causal relationship between a stable policy oligopoly and managed reform during a punctuation in the equilibrium. After a brief description of the emergence of a national policy oligopoly during the 1990s, this section provides evidence of its core properties: its structure, policy image, and stability. The national oligopoly was larger and less exclusive than the sub-national ‘monopolies’ that preceded it, because it had to accommodate many formal veto players involved in decision-making at the national level (although not for all aspects of policy design). Policy design was entrusted to a core group within the KMK, who could simultaneously manage new information and represent the interests of formal and informal veto players. This oligopoly also established a shared policy image acknowledging where German education needed improvement: in the
more technical realm of quality assurance and oversight. Finally, the oligopoly remained stable because it was flexible (building on the institutional genetics of the KMK) and because it had mechanisms to depoliticize issues of contestation. The combination of these properties is evidence of the existence of a particular kind of education policy subsystem in Germany: a national oligopoly. Together, these properties ensured that the oligopoly could manage the reform agenda during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium, such that instruments of quality assurance were central to reforms, rather than policy changes that were more radical, or blocked altogether.

3.4.1 Emergence of a National Oligopoly

In the mid-1990s, there was a shift in power just as quality assurance started to become prevalent in the KMK. The traditional coalitions between Ministerial appointees and pressure participants began to change as the authority of teachers’ group began to diminish, a vacuum occupied by a new kind of expert. Teachers’ groups had established themselves as an authority on policy design by leveraging control over implementation, yet teachers began to come into disrepute amongst some elected officials and bureaucrats. At the same time, the perception of education research was changing, affording the opportunity for a new type of expert to become a conveyer belt for innovative ideas. Previously, experts consulted by the state were academics in education departments at regional universities, involved in local communities, consuming German language publications, and mostly engaged with historical and philosophical approaches that informed teacher training (a primary function of their work). During the 1990s, a new generation of researchers started to become involved in more pragmatic discussions about policy. These researchers were seldom affiliated to teachers’ organizations or political parties, and were

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113 Dieter Hundt, President of the BDA, called teachers “the world champions in taking paid holidays” (quoted by Kiel 2008, 63). While Minister-President of Lower Saxony, Gerhard Schröder apparently characterized teachers as “lazy bums” and “Christmas geese who are not asked before they are slaughtered” (Ibid., 63). Konrad Gilges, a Bundestag Parliamentarian sitting on an education sub-committee was reported to have said during a meeting, without much contradiction from colleagues: “That wasn’t a human being. It was a teacher” (Philologen-Verband NRW 2001). Even educationist Peter Struck, himself a former teacher, criticized teachers for wanting “little ‘morning jobs’ with lots of holidays, good pay and routine lessons” (Struck 1994, 16).
generally less concerned with debates over educational values. A former union leader suggested that the new researchers were more interested in conversations about cutting-edge methods like psychometrics: “They were not interested in politics, rather they were concerned about whether they got a research grant” (Anon 5 interview 2014). The new researchers tended to work in national research institutes, were more likely to be members of transnational epistemic communities, and consumed English language academic publications. This new generation of educational expert brought with them a broader, more scientific perspective on education. 

This shift of authority away from teachers and towards educational scientists followed from entrepreneurial activity and policy experimentation on the part of high level political appointees in the Education Ministries, especially in smaller and more ‘nimble’ Länder. As early as 1994, Hamburger Education Minister [Schulsenatorin] Rosemarie Raab had been prompted by anecdotal evidence of high dropout and failure rates in Hamburg schools to begin an independent investigation. Rabb appointed Hermann Lange to oversee the commissioning of local studies of learning outcomes and skills-acquisition, fueling a kind of localized ‘empirical turn’ to policy-making. Lange’s assistant Ulrich Vieluf claimed that this also established Lange as something of an authority on the new sociological and

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114 That is to say, these researchers (unlike their predecessors) were professionally non-partisan, rather than apolitical. Some were politically savvy enough to recognize that they would be the beneficiaries of reforms (in terms of career opportunities and research funding). 

115 National research organizations, long at the fringes of policy conversations when compared to regional university education departments, were deemed ‘less political’ despite increased involvement in education politics. The former Director of DIPF, Wolfgang Mitter, was considered very politically active, whereas Jürgen Baumert of the MPIB was not: “Baumert was different. He did not offer policy prescriptions, understanding that there could be many interpretations for a problem” (Anon 7 interview 2014). The current Director of DIPF, Eckhard Klieme, reflected on the irony of how Baumert (and by extension, himself) were perceived as apolitical yet at the centre of political decision-making: “The founder of the MPIB [Hellmut Becker] had strong connections to the SPD. In the 1960s and 1970s, educational researchers had strong normative commitments – they were ‘doing politics’. But Baumert and affiliated researchers at MPIB were seen as scientific experts. Baumert had a political perspective, but he was never perceived as a political actor. In a sense, Baumert was ‘breaking the rules’ of the MPIB. He moved into the theatre of policy, whereas many researchers do only basic research and do not think about solving societal problems” (Klieme interview 2014)

116 Although these investigations suggested a degree of policy failure by the long-incumbent SPD government in Hamburg, Senator Rabb had decided that she did not want anecdotal evidence from a ‘third party’, but reportedly said that “I would rather bring the bad news myself” (Vieluf interview 2013).
empirical approach to educational policy, bringing these findings to national attention within the KMK (Vieluf interview 2013). These shifts in authority and legitimacy were the institutional backdrop for the development of a national policy oligopoly in the KMK, where previously there had only been sub-national policy monopolies.

3.4.2 Structure of the National Oligopoly

The first property of a stable subsystem is its structure: it must have a bounded and defined membership. For a policy oligopoly, this membership need not have cohesive policy aims to share preferences; they must merely agree on some major aspect of policy, such as instruments, without necessarily agreeing on core policy beliefs. In Germany, a national educational policy oligopoly was comprised of select deputies for the Länder Ministers of Education, advised by a handful of high level civil servants and educational scientists. The oligopoly was a core group of actors working within the KMK, built around the ‘Amtschefskommission’ (the Deputy Ministers Committee for Quality Assurance in Schools), which designed the reform agenda that Länder Ministers presented to the public in December of 2001. This core group was also oligopolistic because their consensus over policy solutions did not entail a shared set of core policy beliefs.

The members of the oligopoly had institutional roles which, as a collective, made them trusted consultants for interpreting issues and advising on the reform agenda. The oligopoly nominally involved the Ministers of Education from the sixteen Länder, but in practice, Ministers deferred to two (sometimes three) Ministries to oversee it. Instead of close involvement, most of the Ministers appointed high civil servants from their Länder Ministries to attend meetings. The oligopoly consolidated around the Deputy Ministers Committee for Quality Assurance in Schools [Amtschefskommission ‘Qualitätssicherung in Schulen’], formed in 1998 by the KMK. A core group of

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117 This was consistent with the generalized committee structure and mode of operating for the KMK. There were several ad hoc or standing committees formed by the KMK to deal with various educational or cultural issues. The Ministers seldom had time or resources to devote themselves to issues in any detail, as they met only four times a
individuals are identifiable: Hermann Lange (State Secretary [Staatsrat a.D.] for Education in Hamburg), Josef Erhard (State Secretary [Ministerialdirektor] for Education in Bavaria), and Jürgen Baumert (Director of the PISA Consortium and researcher at the MPIB). Representing teacher interests was Marianne Demmer, who was responsible for compulsory general education on the managing board of the Education and Science Union (GEW). The individuals in this core group changed over time, because their membership in the oligopoly was contingent on their representation of certain interests, ideas, or ideological policy positions. Each core member had advisors and staff from their own agencies or organizations, many of whom also worked collectively in meetings or working groups that reinforced the boundaries and functions of the oligopoly. Other individuals were invited to participate because of their institutional role and expertise, such as Jochen Schweitzer from Bremen’s Ministry of Education. The Amtschefskommission was the focal point, yet there were overlapping committees or working groups consigned by the KMK during the mid-to-late 1990s, giving the subsystem actors ample opportunity to construct a policy image based on shared ideas about instrumental logic, if not shared policy aims.

The national oligopoly represented a range of different (and often conflicting) perspectives on education. Hermann Lange from Hamburg represented the A-Länder. He was the first Director of this year to reach decisions during a two-day plenary. Thus, the KMK relied on these commissions to investigate issues and brief the KMK as a whole. The Amtschefskommission ‘Qualitätssicherung in Schulen’ began as an ad hoc commission, but quickly consolidated into a permanent body and continues to exist today.

For example, when Hermann Lange’s government lost power in Hamburg in 2002, replacement by his Hamburger Staatsrat successor, Rudolf Lange, would have been inappropriate as he was from the right-of-centre Free Democratic Party (FDP). Instead, Hermann Lange was replaced by Wolfgang Meyer-Hesemann, the SPD State Secretary (Education) from NRW, later State Secretary for Schleswig-Holstein from 2003. Meyer-Hesemann retained his position on the Amtschefskommission until 2009. Amongst the educational scientists there was also continuity in change. Jürgen Baumert was the foremost amongst the co-called ‘PISA-popes’, educational scientists that managed PISA and other international assessments. The ‘PISA-pope’ term was later applied to Manfred Prenzel (National Project Manager for PISA 2003 and 2006), Eckhard Klieme (Director for the German Institute for International Education Research, which managed PISA 2009 and 2012), and Olaf Köller, Director of the IQB from 2004 until 2010. Although individuals formed part of the national oligopoly because of their institutional role, one must not discount the importance of personal characteristics and relationships. Interviewees involved in meetings during the late 1990s commented on how compelling and convincing Lange and Baumert could be with arguments or presentation of evidence. Although subsystems have structural aspects that help us make systematic comparisons and generalizable causal inferences, when it comes to politics and policymaking, one should take care not to underestimate the importance of individual nous.
**Amtschefskommission** and a key figure. Josef Erhard from Bavaria represented the ideological perspectives of the B-Länder. Lange and Erhard were advised by a cadre of advisors and experts from within their own Ministries or Landesinstituts, as well as experts from other Länder Ministries who had experience in this area and were nominated by their own Ministers. The Amtschefskommission met more regularly than the Education Ministers – officially six times a year, unofficially about once per month – and unlike the KMK plenary, their meetings were private. A prominent researcher who consulted with the Amtschefskommission commented on the tenor of these meetings:

“these discussions were not at the ‘political level’, but rather more at the ‘working level’, among State Secretaries and administrators...Linked to these [meetings] were other people that discussed PISA results. The idea was that [Lange and Erhard] would represent the different political sides but allow for much collaboration at the level below the Amtschefs. There really was a learning process within the ministries, below the political level” (Prenzel interview 2014).

However, learning within educational administrations was a positive externality. The role of the Amtschefskommission was not to facilitate policy learning, but rather, to establish the parameters of acceptable innovation and the boundaries of reform.

The Amtschefskommission deliberated with two other actors in the national oligopoly: the PISA Consortium [*PISA-Konsortium*] and the executive of the Education and Science Union (GEW). The PISA Consortium was formed after the KMK agreed to participate in the PISA assessment at a meeting at the OECD in Paris in 1997. Professor Jürgen Baumert at the Max Planck Institute (MPIB) was appointed Director of the Consortium, which made him nominally independent. However, a civil servant who was seconded to the Amtschefskommission and PISA Consortium said that educational experts from the Landesinstituts were also assigned to Baumert to help with his work (Schweitzer interview 2014). By the late 1990s, Baumert had become a trusted consultant to the KMK on all aspects of PISA, and worked

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119 “The PISA Consortium was populated by different officials from Länder ministries somewhat by happenstance – it depended on whether a Minister wanted to send one of their people to sit on it, and if they had staff with some competence to deal with these subjects. No one knew then how much impact PISA would have” (Schweitzer interview 2014).
closely with Hermann Lange to demonstrate its implications for policy design.\footnote{Even before the Consortium’s project management team began to produce working papers in the late 1990s, there had been a productive working relationship between Baumert and Lange, as told by Lange’s assistant (Vieluf interview 2013). Due to their demonstrable competence with the subject matter, Lange and Baumert became influential within the policy oligopoly and in the KMK. A prominent expert on the PISA Consortium suggested that, “Baumert made research decisions and Lange made political decisions. Lange was SPD, but the CDU also trusted him” (Tillmann interview 2013). A ministerial appointee to the PISA Consortium commented: “Lange was very competent. Josef Erhard was not as competent, but often consulted privately with Baumert to better understand the issues prior to conferences. He also had officials from his own Ministry to assist and brief him. He could also inform newly appointed ministers or state secretaries from the A-Länder. Erhard and Lange were in their positions for over a decade, so they were well-informed and trusted. [Therefore] the administration is sometimes much more important than the Ministers” (Schweitzer interview 2014).} Another consultant was Marianne Demmer from the GEW. Demmer was important due to her role on the GEW Executive, overseeing school development policies, but also influential because she could speak for the concerns of teachers in the GEW. Her role according to Jochen Schweitzer, was ‘critical, but constructive’ (Schweitzer interview 2014): influential in shaping how external evaluations would be used, rather than framing quality assurance for the Ministers. It was important to the Amtschefskommission – and Lange especially – that teachers were part of the discussion (Vieluf interview 2013). The sixteen Ministers of Education sitting in the KMK were the ultimate decision-makers and agenda setters, but the Amtschefskommission was a core stability mechanism that allowed the oligopoly to influence these decision-makers.

This group of agenda-managers were sensitive to other stakeholders in education, but were also careful to exclude them from the oligopoly when it came to framing issues and managing the agenda. The difference between membership and non-membership was the type and extent of deliberation: oligopoly members were involved in deliberations over policy design, whereas non-members might be consulted regarding their ideas or their policy preferences, but were not invited to directly participate in forming an agenda. For example, the interests of teachers were taken seriously, yet groups like the German Philological Association (DPhV) were not directly represented in a national oligopoly.\footnote{Before PISA, there were preliminary discussions in the KMK regarding national teaching standards, to which teacher representatives were invited. An official of the KMK who attended these meetings commented that the “teachers’ unions and associations were split. The Philologenverband [DPhV] generally supported the change...} Instead,
there were mechanisms to involve teachers’ associations in sub-national policy ‘monopolies’, and the overlap of membership between the traditional monopolies and the newer national oligopoly allowed for the basic preferences of teachers to filter from the sub-national to the national, even in the absence of structured and systematic consultation with all teacher groups in the KMK. The same cannot be said for other stakeholder groups. There were students’ councils at the school level, but no systematic representation in the Ministry. Education experts and politicians confirmed that parents’ and students’ associations were weak even at the Land-level, were further fragmented at the national level, and thus seldom were these groups consulted in the KMK (Dedering interview 2013; Anon 5 interview 2014).

Economic actors who were beneficiaries of the education system were also heard, if not incorporated into agenda-management. Finally, there was another set of actors quite deliberately excluded from process, but because the main issues were with the Hauptschule, they were not so interested. The GEW were more critical [of standards].” (Anon 4 interview 2014). It was clear within the national oligopoly that Gymnasium teachers would staunchly resist any policies which would compromise the Gymnasium or water down the quality of students entering it. As long as discussions about differentiated schooling were avoided, Gymnasium teachers were not much interested in ‘technical’ discussions about standards. Not so for Realschule teachers. A veteran civil servant asserted, these teachers were considered the staunchest protectors of the status quo. They were a smaller group, more often overlooked by policy-makers, and thus they struggled to retain their status and distinct ‘policy’ identity, even with their allies in the DL, such as the DPhV. Their biggest concern was the abolition of the Hauptschule, or any measure that would allow underperforming students from entering the Realschule (Schweitzer interview 2014). As we see from the eventual policy outcomes, this group was right to be concerned about the adverse effects of standard-setting. Standards were set at an intermediate level, intended to bring up achievement levels so that all students could ostensibly be Realschule-capable. Although the phasing out of the Hauptschule over the last decade was due more to demography and economics than to the creation of national standards, the costs for reform were imposed on a group of teachers with the least capacity to resist.

122 The Länder Ministries would routinely feel out whether teachers would be willing to implement policies, using systematic and non-systematic consultation mechanisms. To take one example: in North Rhine-Westphalia, teachers representing each school type and nominated by fellow teachers were seconded to the Ministry to sit on Staff Councils [Personalräte] and act as liaisons for teacher concerns. A ministerial official told me that they discussed proposals with the appropriate Councillors early in policy development to ensure that policies would be implemented (Jaeger interview 2014). Major policies would typically undergo a ‘co-determination’ procedure [Mitbestimmung] that required Council consent, while policies that did not change working conditions and did not require consent went through a ‘cooperation’ procedure [Mitwirkung]. The NRW Ministry also invited ad hoc input from regional teachers’ associations, such as the DPhV, in order to be aware of teacher concerns (for example, see Silbernagel and Cieslik 2005).

123 In 2005, the German Employers Associations (BDA) and Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) issued a joint statement advocating for standard-setting and robust quality assurance in education (DGB and BDA 2005), but the policy oligopoly did not include these actors when managing the reform agenda. Their general concern with education was widely known, yet their involvement in discussions about education policy was typically with Bund actors rather than the KMK.
the oligopoly – the Bund. Even though the Federal Education Ministry (BMBF) and the Federal Parliament (Bundestag) had established competence and even special venues for discussing the design of education policy (see Section 3.5.3), the KMK had an “irrational reaction towards any Bund involvement” (Schweitzer interview 2014). From the perspective of subsystem politics, however, the reaction was quite rational: the KMK wanted to claim credit for solving problems within their jurisdiction, and institutions had developed which would allow Länder Ministers to claim credit, retain control, and pursue their pre-existing policy aims. Membership in the national oligopoly was thus inclusive yet also narrow, with members recognizing boundaries between the national oligopoly and other concerned stakeholders. For the institutional and behavioural indicators which provide specific evidence of the structure of a German national policy oligopoly, see Appendix A.
3.4.3 Policy Image of the National Oligopoly

The second property of a subsystem is shared policy image. Subsystem actors must share an interpretation of reform issues in the policy area, and that interpretation must put those actors at the centre of policy solutions. For a policy oligopoly, this shared interpretation need not mean agreement over abstract policy aims or core beliefs. In Germany, actors in the national policy oligopoly did not agree on appropriate aims for education systems (such as excellence or equity, or the socially integrative versus economic purposes of education). Nor did they agree on the appropriate structures to facilitate those ends (such as tripartite schooling or comprehensives). The oligopoly could, however, reach consensus on a policy image that put the KMK at the centre of decision-making for education reform.
This image acknowledged that a poor international ranking was of concern, and the problems identified by PISA were legitimate (such as a correlation between social background and educational outcome). However, the image asserted – despite some interpretations of evidence to the contrary – that the problems identified by PISA were not the result of differentiated schooling, poor teaching methods, underfunded school systems, or weak sub-national administration. Rather, the problems were with poor quality assurance mechanisms, lack of diagnostics training for teachers (especially at primary level), and lack of information about cause-and-effect. The problems were, in effect, instrumental. It was not that the educational aims of prevailing policy-makers were faulty or misguided, or that the structures or priorities of schooling were problematic, it was that the instruments used to assess and steer education were insufficient. Furthermore, more information was needed before conclusions could be drawn from a poor PISA ranking, and evidence should be gathered vis-à-vis inter-Länder comparison. Defining and solving problems in this way involved a change in instrumental logic: towards better measurement, more research, and establishing a national quality assurance framework. This ‘instrumental’ solution ensured that the KMK would remain agenda-setters for education, and oligopoly actors would oversee (or create agencies to facilitate) the implementation of standard-setting at the national level. This policy image became the basis for reforms proposed by the KMK in late 2001.

The national oligopoly had already cohered around a shared ‘technical’ interpretation of issues that arose out of the ‘TIMSS shock’ in 1997. The release of results from the 1995 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) assessment generated a strong response within the policy community, yet actors in the subsystem were not convinced that it indicated a profound failure of German education. Some questioned the methodology of TIMSS (especially the sampling method), but most saw TIMSS as demonstrating the need for more empirical knowledge about German education. This was the point at which the ‘empirical turn’ in education research began in the KMK, spurring the collection of more reliable data via external evaluations, and eventually to new quality assurance
mechanisms emphasizing accountability rather than resource investment. In the late 1990s following the release of TIMSS results, committees in the KMK were developing technical interpretations of educational issues. First, there was a rapprochement regarding the utility of centralized assessment instruments during compulsory schooling.\(^{124}\) Second, there was a consensus that teacher education needed evaluation and improvement, and that standards should be set for training not for individual teachers.\(^{125}\) Third, and most importantly, actors in the subsystem agreed that more and better information about education could be gleaned from comparative assessments. Without the TIMSS shock within the policy community, it is unlikely that actors would have cohered into a national oligopoly with a shared policy image, and also unlikely that PISA would have elicited the policy response it did.

Beyond the technical aspects of the policy image which demanded instrumental policy solutions, there were also social aspects which framed who should be managing the new instruments. This shared image suggested that the actors responsible for governance and implementation of education policies had not failed in their duties, and indeed remained best placed to implement the reform agenda. This social dimension of the policy image saw an important role for three types of actors represented in the national policy oligopoly: teachers, researchers, and Länder policy-makers. I expand on each in turn.

Ultimately, teachers were the front line of policy implementation, a point that was recognized within the oligopoly. According to one expert, rank and file teachers had been resigned to some degree of reform.\(^{126}\) Initially, many teachers saw external evaluations and standard-setting as a threat,

\(^{124}\) From 1999 on (allowing time for implementation), school-leaving examinations became more popular even in SPD-governed Länder historically opposed to them (Tillmann et al. 2008).
\(^{125}\) Unlike some prominent federal politicians who shifted blame for education problems onto teachers (as well as the Länder), the KMK blamed teacher-training rather than teacher quality. In 1998, the KMK convened a commission of experts and school administrators into a Joint Commission for Teacher Training \([Gemischte Kommission für Lehrerbildung]\). In 1999, this Commission recommended improvements to teacher training that did not require overhaul of the institutions involved (Terhart 1999). In October of 2000, representatives from all the major teachers’ associations met with the KMK and issued a joint declaration supporting these recommendations (the so-called ‘Bremen Declaration’, see KMK 2000).
\(^{126}\) “[Teachers] did not think they could block the policy reforms, but knew they could undercut the process anyway [if they wanted] by not using the data...they have autonomy to prevent full implementation” (Dedering interview 2013).
especially if used to isolate and blame individual teachers. Aware of the concerns of their membership, the GEW executive felt compelled to resist certain types of external evaluations and national standards, but they could also see reform as an opportunity to increase public interest that could lead to more resources.\textsuperscript{127} As long as individual teachers were not singled out, and the teaching profession was not discredited wholesale, then the GEW executive shared in a perception that new quality assurance instruments could improve education. The way that specific quality assurance instruments were framed became important: how external evaluations would be used, how standards would be calibrated, and so on.\textsuperscript{128} Likewise for the emphasis on reforming pre-service teacher training rather than re-evaluating the relationship between the general teaching profession and school structure. Although improving the practice of current teachers was an element of the shared policy image, oligopoly actors shifted much of the blame onto how teachers were trained rather than how they performed.\textsuperscript{129} By necessity, teachers

\textsuperscript{127} Jochen Schweitzer, a Ministerial official involved in discussions with the GEW and other associations, put it like this: “Every poor result [from comparative assessments] put greater pressure on GEW membership, and seemed to heap blame on teachers for failures in the system. So, teachers wanted their leadership to resist external evaluations and testing. The GEW always said they needed more money and teachers. Yet studies showed that lower teacher/student ratios did not necessarily lead to better outcomes, and the GEW leadership knew this too. But they had to represent their members, and cannot allow ideas that threatened their members’ interests too much. This is an important difference between members and leaders in these organizations.” Schweitzer went on to describe how Ministerial officials tried to be sensitive to teachers’ interests, and that blaming them for failures was futile. “Furthermore, there are differences between what you know, and what you can say. A Ministry official can never say: ‘perhaps one third of teachers should not be teachers, they have the wrong aptitude or skills, etc.’ The Minister cannot say that, even if it were true. There is ‘internal knowledge’, and knowledge which is never publicly discussed or admitted” (Schweitzer interview 2014).

\textsuperscript{128} Although official prescriptions and criteria for standard-setting did not materialize until 2003 (Klieme et al. 2003), the discussion about high-stakes testing and standard-setting pre-dated PISA. By the time of the Klieme report, the idea of high-stakes evaluations had been mooted, and standards were to be set at an intermediate level (i.e., to reflect the average student). One educational researcher involved in implementing standards described the latter as a ‘political decision’: “the idea of setting minimum standards – similar to the ‘No Child Left behind’ program in the US – would not have interested Bavaria. The A-Länder wanted to lift the lowest achievers, but this alone would not have worked for Bavaria or Baden-Württemberg” (Anon 5 interview 2014). Intermediate standards which would not be used to evaluate individual teacher performance was a political compromise for the actors in the oligopoly.

\textsuperscript{129} Except for those very near to retirement, many teachers saw the benefit in learning more about praxis, as long as they retained their professional status and remained relatively autonomous in their classrooms. A high civil servant from Bavaria remarked that changing structures would be expensive, while changing culture was cheaper and more effective even though it took much longer (Anon 9 interview 2014). This comment was made during a discussion about reforms to teacher training: the hope of the Bavarian Ministry was that implementing higher standards for teacher training institutions would improve teaching quality over the long term, while trying to hold
would play a vital role in implementing any policy change, yet the GEW executive’s early involvement in the design and calibration of policy instruments ensured that they participated in how the policy image was framed by the national oligopoly.

Educational researchers played a vital role in legitimizing the ‘empirical turn’ in education, and conveying an image of so-called ‘evidence-based steering’ [Evidenzbasierte Steuerung]. Compared to what counted as expertise in sub-national policy monopolies, the national policy oligopoly cohered around a relatively narrow image of what was considered legitimate evidence. The policy image that emerged was explicitly comparative and statistical, and based on measurement of educational outputs. International comparative assessments used psychometrics and robust statistical methods across relatively large sample sizes. Psychometrics was not new to education (recall the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Quotient test), but its introduction to Germany, alongside standardized testing and powerful tools for regression analysis, revolutionized how evaluation policies were perceived by subsystem actors. The national policy oligopoly cohered around an image of policy-making informed by (a certain kind of) evidence, and that unless more was known about the relationships between social and educational variables, wholesale re-orientation of an education system would be ill-advised. Instead, the development of policy instruments for more and better information was advisable, and central to the policy image conveyed by the national oligopoly.

Finally, this policy image reinforced Länder responsibility for education, even for national issues. The 1997 Constance Agreement (KMK 1997) updated previous agreements made in the KMK, such as the Hamburg Agreements of 1964 and 1971. It encouraged Länder to share experiences, and develop new evaluation tools and agencies.130 The KMK stressed that competition between Länder was not

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130 Following a plenary session of the KMK in October of 1997, all sixteen Ministers of Education signed the Constance Agreement. This Agreement committed the Länder to regular participation in national and international
anathema to cooperative outcomes – indeed, competition and cooperation were both essential for quality development because together they could facilitate policy learning along with a ‘race to the top’ dynamic. In effect, the KMK re-affirmed the federal policy-making structure of German education: the right for students to benefit from heterogeneity (in school structure and curricula) as well as the responsibility of sub-national education systems to ensure national quality and mobility. This federal governance dynamic was central to the policy image emerging from the national oligopoly in the late 1990s, and other subsystem actors (teachers, researchers) were careful about respecting it. For the institutional and behavioural indicators which provide specific evidence of the policy image of a German national policy oligopoly, see Appendix B.

3.4.4 Stability of the National Oligopoly

The final property of a subsystem is stability. Although Germany’s oligopoly had an unconventional structure and a novel approach to interpretation, the subsystem remained sufficiently stable during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium that it could influence the form of policy change. Stability is not a property unique to oligopolies (indeed, perhaps ‘monopolies’ can be more stable and durable). However, stability in any subsystem leads to trust-building, socialization of norms and ideologies, and institutional memory of past problems (and solutions). The German national policy oligopoly managed to be both flexible and durable because it could mitigate internal conflict, and this engendered a stability which allowed subsystem actors to manage policy change during the PISA shock era.

In many respects, the national policy oligopoly had flexibility ‘baked-in’ because it was organized in and around the Kultusministerkonferenz. Historically, a high degree of flexibility had proven a problem

comparative education studies, and to use the results to improve education systems (KMK 1997). The Constance Agreement called for: systematic national comparisons focussed on basic competences and transversal skills (modelled on international large-scale assessments); the creation of a Commission that would design appropriate evaluation instruments (the Amtschefskommission); and the development of benchmarking practices and standards (working with the BMBF and OECD as needed). Although this was not quite a full ‘empirical turn’ or ‘comparative turn’ in German education policy, it certainly indicated a major strategic turning point in German educational quality assurance (Overesch 2007, 193).
for the KMK, because there was little to compel Education Ministers to work together. Two types of
decisions had proven relatively intractable in the past: any policy decision involving money, and formal
agreements.\footnote{An official with the KMK Secretariat commented on the typical approach to money: “the Plenum [of Ministers]
must unanimously approve anything to do with money, even for a single Euro...[They] do not have the time,
resources, or institutional structures to consider the perspective of the collective good of the Länder. For each
Ministry, there is so much to be done to steer their own education system. Furthermore, as a consequence of PISA,
the education ministries have become a critical portfolio. In many Länder, elections can be won or lost based on
education issues” (Anon 4 interview 2014). Another official in the KMK Secretariat suggested that formal
agreements were also problematic: “Sometimes it was best to discuss an issue to a certain point, and then not
have a formal text emerge from the KMK, because eventually some Länder would disagree with the KMK or
another Länder. For example, take the Hamburg Agreement...many of the policies are no longer used or applicable,
but the Länder do not want to re-open this because [the Ministers] would need to get agreement from their
Landtag. Therefore, the agreement still exists formally, but some aspects of it are simply neglected” (Anon 3
interview 2014)} Although KMK decisions had high plasticity, they also created a persistent collective
action dilemma: any issue involving budget commitments or formal agreement could avoid conflict by
being flexible to the point of lacking national coordination. The KMK overcame collective action
dilemmas by avoiding controversy, and by deferring to experts and advisors. Angelika Hufner, former
Permanent Representative of the Secretary-General of the KMK, describes the Plenum as a location not
for debate, but for pragmatic discussions about things that could be coordinated across Länder: “If an
issue arises in the Ministers’ Conference that cannot be agreed to, then the discussion stops and is
defurred back to the appropriate committee, commission or conference” (Hufner interview 2014).
Flexibility was a functional necessity for any KMK body tasked with designing or implementing education
policy. Even before the punctuation in the policy equilibrium, issues were becoming depoliticized due to
their technical complexity. This depoliticization of issues allowed the KMK to remain flexible, yet also set
national standards that demanded compliance. Not only did the Amtschefskommission inherently reflect
the flexibility of the KMK, they were also legitimated by expert advice and supported by implementation
commitments from teachers’ representatives. This inherent flexibility and de facto delegation allowed
the national oligopoly to find virtue in subsystem flexibility, where it had long been a vice.
The durability of the national oligopoly was also augmented by depoliticization. The *de facto* delegation of issues away from the more politicized KMK Plenum had created an enduring ‘instrument constituency’ within *Amtschefskommission* meetings. The oligopoly was small enough – no more than forty individuals at any given time– that they could meet in person and in private, they could deliberate candidly, and they could come to understand (if not always share) beliefs, ideas, and policy preferences (Hüfner interview 2014). The low turnover of key individuals greatly consolidated the oligopoly: Ministers of Education were typically replaced every few years and arrived to problems anew, whereas many of the actors making up the core of the national oligopoly were involved for a decade or longer, allowing them to build trust and create an institutional memory. Finally, because an instrumental logic had become the persistent focal point of the oligopoly, the Länder were assured that they would be able to maintain their distributional and school structure preferences, and teachers were assured that standards and evaluations would be used to enhance their teaching practice and not to assess their teaching competence. Unlike many previous issues faced by the KMK, the oligopoly that formed around educational quality assurance was durable, and during the punctuation in the policy equilibrium, amounted to a kind of ‘instrument constituency’ that influenced the policy agenda before and during the PISA shock. For the institutional and behavioural indicators which provide specific evidence of the stability of a German national policy oligopoly, see Appendix C.

3.4.5 Conclusion: Properties of a Policy Oligopoly

This section provided empirical evidence that a national policy oligopoly existed for educational evaluation policies in Germany, and supports the argument that an oligopoly can manage the macro-political agenda even when it was the Länder Ministers of Education who set it. The oligopoly in question had demonstrable evidence of the three key properties of an influential policy subsystem: an exclusive membership structure, a shared policy image, and the means to manage conflict internally in order to project stability. In the next section, I examine how this oligopoly influenced the reform
agenda, producing a significant change in instrumental logic without entirely upsetting the education status quo.

3.5 Effects of a Policy Oligopoly: Agenda-management

This section provides evidence that a policy oligopoly can manage reforms agenda by framing issues as instrumental, thereby avoiding a move of policy design to other venues. Much of the time, policy subsystems try to do this as a matter of course. Actors in the subsystem have a vested interest in establishing their preferred policy agenda, free from outside interference. For decades, the Länder Ministries of Education – collaborating locally with teacher representatives – had a monopoly on policy design because of the lack of public attention. Yet when a punctuation in the policy equilibrium occurred, as it did in Germany upon release of PISA results in December 2001, subsystem actors managed the reform agenda to ensure that their interests were not compromised. It was no coincidence that the KMK’s Catalogue for Action came a mere 48 hours after the release of the PISA results, as the oligopoly had been made aware of the poor PISA results prior to public release. Ministers presented the policy image that emerged from the *Amtschefskommission*, which allowed them to set the reform agenda for years to come. In this section, I examine the strategies of oligopoly actors, and their effects on educational policy-making during the punctuation in the equilibrium, beginning in late 2001. I then explain why successful agenda management obviated the need for venue-shopping in Germany: although public debate over education continued for years after the initial PISA shock, policy development and implementation had been entrusted to actors in, or agents of, the national policy oligopoly. By managing the agenda at the beginning of the punctuation in the policy equilibrium, subsystem actors retained control over the form and degree of reforms in Germany.

3.5.1 Image Control: Framing as Political Strategy

A strategy available to actors in stable, well-structured subsystems is to manage a policy agenda set by others by conveying a united front and coherent policy frame despite negative public attention. Stable
subsystems, such as the oligopoly in Germany, can transmit a coherent image from within a ‘failure’ or ‘crisis’ frame by depoliticizing issues: acknowledging that there are problems, yet defining them as technical issues in need of instrumental solutions, such that reforms are best managed by policy experts within the subsystem. This is what the oligopoly did when they learned about the imminent release of PISA results. The *Amtschefskommission* (supported by their oligopoly allies) managed the agenda before other actors had the opportunity to define the problem differently, such as claiming that poor PISA rankings were brought about by decentralized education, stratified schooling, or low-quality teaching. The oligopoly had a small but distinct advantage when it came to knowledge about PISA. As an intergovernmental organization, the OECD released results to the government agencies that had commissioned (and paid for) PISA, just prior to public release. Because the KMK agreed to PISA testing in 1998, and appointed the Max Planck Institute for Education Research (MPIB) to carry out the first cycle of study in Germany, it was the PISA Consortium that had the data and rankings before anyone else. The German PISA Consortium could share PISA results with the KMK, and more importantly, with the *Amtschefskommission* (Tillmann et al. 2008; Tillmann interview 2013). The intent of sharing the results with the *Amtschefskommission* (and not other government agencies) was to minimize the risk of information leaks, but they also were at the core of a (national) policy oligopoly. This afforded a brief opportunity for the oligopoly to frame a reform agenda based on their shared policy image, and allowed the Länder Ministers to claim credit for coordinating a plan of action in the KMK.

*Taken carte blanche*, the frame that emanated from the 2000 PISA results was quite negative. It painted an unexpectedly grim picture of German education systems: poor performance overall, compounded by a high degree of social selectivity and inequality. This was reinforced by the persistently low public opinion of the teaching profession, and by the perceived connection between education and
the economic recession at the time. PISA data suggested the following: that the competency of German students in math, science and literacy was far behind international leaders and generally below the OECD average; that poor student achievement was apparent among both stronger and weaker students (contradicting the assumption that the tripartite school system supported achievement of homogenous learning groups); that it was not only general achievement that was below average, but the disparity between strong and weak students was greater in Germany than elsewhere; that German schools encouraged students from migrant backgrounds less successfully than schools in other OECD countries; and that the connection between attainment of competence and social background was stronger in Germany than other countries (Döbert, Klieme, and Sroka 2004c, 344–45). Over time, many educational experts concluded that the tripartite school structure and decentralized policy-making were not helpful. Initially, however, the public and media were more focussed on the low international ranking of Germany in the PISA assessment, rather than the thornier problem of what the data behind those rankings revealed. Education Ministers responded strongly to the rankings because, in the words of one high ranking civil servant, “no minister can stand in front of the press and say that they do not know what to do, that they will need more time to look at the data” (Anon interview 2014).

Timing was important: “public interest in the results of comparative studies was inseparable from the debate about Germany’s economic situation” (Klemm and van Ackeren 2004, 341). The same interviewee commented on how stressful and challenging it was to prepare their Ministers in light of the negative policy image coming from an external rather than internal source: “we only received PISA data a day or two before the public. Effectively, we had to understand and interpret the findings overnight, so that we could brief the Minister the next morning before they faced the press” (Anon 9 interview 2014). Despite these pressures, Ministers relied on their advisors to contextualize the policy area and help them set the agenda. An expert and insider commented: “Most of the political actors [in the KMK] had only a handful of advisors to help them understand all of this data, to help them understand the results of large-scale assessments. Ministers had a lot of people working for them, and every Ministry had between one and three people devoted to understanding large-scale research. They were critical actors capable of framing the whole problem. They were asked to produce a policy brief of a few pages that condensed all this research. In 2001, when I was a member of the PISA Consortium, the Minister from Bremen invited me to consult with them and I remember they asked [a Ministerial appointee from Bremen] to condense a 500-page research analysis into a two-page document!” (Tillmann interview 2013).
Ministers and their staff would have preferred to avoid these ordinal rankings altogether, because according to Lange’s assistant, Ulrich Vielf"u:  

“they do not give information about marginal differences. In the public eye, it only seems that some are failures and others are somewhat successful. Yet the more that media and public opinion made an issue of the rankings, the more that [the Education Ministers] rallied together for a compromise solution” (Vieluf interview 2013).

The rankings conveyed a negative image, yet also presented an opportunity. If the KMK could somewhat positively frame the instrumental response as ‘well in hand’, then it could be used to secure resources, to pressure ‘street-level bureaucrats’ into accepting reforms (of which certain of their representatives had already been privy), and for Education Ministers to appear united behind a common initiative.

Had the L"ander Ministers wanted to politicize the issue, here was an opportunity to do so. Public attention and the negative policy image would have given them leverage to make sweeping reforms of education policy, yet this approach would also escalate the issue to policy discussions in the L"ander Parliaments and likely lead to further discussions in the Bundestag and the BMBF (see Section 3.5.3). At the prompting of oligopoly actors, the KMK quickly presented a modest set of policy reforms (the Catalogue for Action) which suggested that education systems had not failed. The national quality assurance policies that emerged in late 2001 amounted to an appeal for more time and different instrumentation to fix what had led to the poor ranking, such that a re-orientation of education would be unnecessary. Rather than being divisive, the Education Ministers agreed to a set of reforms which ensured that KMK commissions would remain in charge of policies they were already working on. Moreover, the policy frame mirrored the image that had united a national oligopoly in the late 1990s: that teachers were not to blame, teacher training instruments were; that more research was necessary to really understand the issues, and that the PISA ranking was negative but the KMK had been aware of many of the underlying issues and had policy solutions at hand (namely national standards and external evaluation mechanisms). As one union leader involved in the design process noted: “The PISA shock acted as an accelerator and unifier. Most of the changes were discussed earlier, they were already ‘in
the air” (Anon 13 interview 2014). It was a political strategy by a core group of staff and advisors within the KMK to have the Ministers present this image of German education, allowing subsystem actors to work together on policy solutions even though they did not agree on the abstract aims of education, nor even on many of the problems faced by German education.

There was also opportunity for other actors, such as teachers, to politicize the KMK’s reform agenda in the months following the release of the Catalogue for Action. There was much public discussion of PISA in popular media, and there were education experts who criticized the Catalogue for Action for not going far enough because it did not alter school structures (Anon 15 interview 2014). Moving to comprehensive schooling (and equality of teacher status) had long been a fundamental policy goal of the Education and Science Union (GEW), and the GEW concurred that it might eventually be necessary to radically reform the tripartite school structure. However, rather than advocate for this during the PISA shock, the GEW expressed reserved support for the reform program, if properly implemented and financed. As for the German Philological Association (DPhV), their greatest concern was a revival of debate over school structure and renewed calls for ‘comprehensivization’ (DPhV 2004). However, this was clearly not part of the Catalogue for Action so they could not oppose the reforms on this basis (and indeed, interpreted later PISA-E findings as a reinforcement of the value of differentiated schooling). While the DPhV was not especially sceptical of testing and performance evaluation, they were concerned about the effects of PISA testing on the academic freedom of Gymnasium teachers. Yet the instruments were deliberately designed to avoid a ‘teaching-to-the-test’ dynamic. Moreover,

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134 For the GEW, proper implementation meant no high stakes testing, no evaluation of individual teachers, more evidence gathering (such as the forthcoming national study, PISA-E), and additional resources for education research, teacher training, and the new all-day schools. Years later, Marianne Demmer herself argued (on behalf of the GEW) that implementation had been poor, and that there had been a lack of human and financial resources at the school level. She observed that PISA had encouraged a boom in empirical educational research, but other aspects (such as teacher training) had been neglected (Demmer 2010). In 2009, the GEW supported protest events involving other stakeholders, in which the pace and depth of these reforms were called into question (Nikolai, Briken, and Niemann 2017). Nonetheless, during the punctuation in the policy equilibrium from 2001 until 2005, the GEW did not use strikes or other tools of influence in an attempt to block or overturn the Catalogue for Action.
because they were excluded from the policy oligopoly, the DPhV could not activate their usual strategies and alliances. Therefore, the greatest opponents to the reform agenda, teachers’ groups, had been either co-opted by the policy design process, or sidelined by the type of reform. The oligopoly’s ability to frame the policy agenda ensured that the managed reforms would be difficult to oppose, even in other venues such as legislatures or the media.

3.5.2 Image Control: Framing as Causal Mechanism

Looking back on the path of national-coordinated policies since late 2001, one might surmise that the strategy of agenda management did indeed determine the form of policy change. Education still received public attention, and much of it negative (as is generally the wont of media), but the Länder were left to get on with the reforms and the implementation of new policy instruments. Undoubtedly PISA had politicized the discourse on education, but the policy prescriptions which emerged after the PISA shock were comparatively depoliticized – it was widely accepted that German education systems needed standards, including standards for teacher training, as well as mechanisms for external evaluation and evidence-gathering. The institutionalization of the oligopolistic frame was perhaps best exemplified by the creation of a para-public institution for managing national standards – the Institute for Quality Development in Education (IQB). Created in 2004 and funded by the KMK and the Länder, the IQB institutionalized the new evaluation logic and reinforced the importance of the

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135 The PISA-shock and quick release of the Catalogue for Action brought the agenda to national public attention, where the DPhV’s consultative ‘inside’ strategies and membership in sub-national policy monopolies were not very effective. Furthermore, DPhV alliances with parent organizations (those associated with the Gymnasium) could not be relied on to resist this reform agenda: all parents were interested in improving the education system, and the managed agenda suggested that improvements were already designed and underway (Nikolai, Briken, and Niemann 2017, 134).

136 One of the ‘PISA-popes’ commented: “After PISA, education became more and more important politically. Political parties could attack one another on the basis of their educational record. Education and schooling became very important during elections” (Prenzel interview 2014). Yet, the record itself was based on evidence taken from the new evaluation policies, and the degree to which the national or international standards were upheld. School structure and governance were seldom electoral issues, even though educational experts continued to discuss their impact.
The IQB also applied the logic of standards to national assessment mechanisms (centralized exams, prescribed learning outcomes, competency models, and standards for teacher training programs). Finally, the IQB could do all this without overt interference with the day-to-day operations of Länder Ministries of Education, or teachers in their classrooms. The instrumental logic of standard-setting was conceived by oligopoly actors in the KMK prior to the PISA shock, and getting instrumentation onto the agenda – to the exclusion of more radical solutions – successfully controlled the path of change when the policy equilibrium re-stabilized.

As often as not, the empirical turn was about effectively mobilizing knowledge rather than actually learning from it (see Boswell 2009). Isabell van Ackeren is a researcher frequently consulted by the Ministry in NRW, and told me that policy-makers were tactical in their use of expert knowledge and understood that evidence could be used selectively to substantiate their policy position (van Ackeren interview 2013). A researcher at the IQB put it like this: “the KMK [advisory team] sets the agenda. They take the results from the IQB, frame the results and draw conclusions from it. The KMK Secretariat prepares the press release, and the Education Ministers are informed more or less at the last minute” (Richter interview 2014). A member of the KMK Secretariat concurred that the agenda was prepared in the KMK, but that it was “always necessary to be in communication with colleagues in the Länder, especially about political subjects” (Anon 3 interview 2014). Furthermore, the science/policy relationship worked both ways, benefiting politicians and researchers alike. During this period, large-scale quantitative studies were more esteemed, and had more legitimacy (Dedering interview 2013). Therefore, certain types of educational researchers benefited from their research being used by policy-makers, in terms of resources, or as appointments to the IQB or Landesinstituts. I do not assert that this was the primary motivation for educational scientists to ask particular questions or use specific methods, but even those at the centre of the research field – such as the ‘PISA-popes’ – recognized that certain types of research had disproportionally benefitted from this ‘empirical turn’ (Klieme interview 2014).

As previously mentioned, teachers in the classrooms were hardly aware of the standards, even though they were increasingly aware that standards existed. Academics and union leaders reported this lack of awareness to be especially the case in Bavaria (Anon 5 interview 2014; Anon 12 interview 2014). It was up to the Länder to ensure that national standards were upheld in the curriculum, in examinations, and in pedagogical training. National standards were also not burdensome for the ministerial officials, because each Land could implement the standards in their own way (i.e., they could choose the ‘technique’ or ‘tool’ by which the logic of standards should be applied: to exams and assessment; or to curriculum development; and so on). Working independently with a number of different ministerial departments, Tobias Diemer from the Mercator Foundation reported that not only could each Ministry implement the instrumental logic in their own way, sometimes different departments in the same Ministry used different tools or techniques, according to their areas of responsibility (Diemer interview 2013).
3.5.3 Venue Control as Political Strategy

Due to insider awareness of problems with German education, there was competition over where education reform should be discussed even before the PISA shock. There was another entity well-positioned to manage a national agenda for educational policy change, yet deliberately excluded due to affiliation with the Bund: The Forum for Education [Forum Bildung]. In the Spring of 1999, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and Bund-Länder Commission for Education Planning and Research Funding (BLK) organized this enquiry at the behest of an extra-parliamentary education committee in the Bundestag. Because the BLK helped to organize, the Länder had to be involved. The Forum was co-chaired by Hans Zehetmair, Minister of Education for Bavaria, and Edelgard Bulmahn, Minister of the BMBF. Participants in the Forum included the Bundestag Parliamentary Secretary (Wolf-Michael Catenhusen), representatives from churches, students, trainees, the BDA and DBG, as well as two academics. Invited to address the Forum were experts from universities, civil society organizations and foundations, school administrators, yet very few teacher representatives. From the late 1990s right up until the federal election in the fall of 2002, there had been a push by federal actors to discuss and even develop education policy initiatives, with the Forum Bildung being a prominent venue for this.

The national oligopoly within the KMK did not support the Forum Bildung as a venue for policy development, despite significant overlap in how education was framed. The Forum released their final recommendations on 16 November 2001, less than three weeks before the KMK released PISA results, and they included funding for all-day schooling [Ganztagschulen] and improved teacher training. Some involved in the Forum have argued that the KMK’s Catalogue for Action was lifted almost entirely from the recommendations of the Forum Bildung (Anon 14 interview 2014). Undoubtedly, the Ganztagschulen initiative was picked up because the BMBF was willing to commit €4 billion to it, and arguably, centralized examinations also emerged from the Forum, according to an expert close to the proceedings (Tillmann interview 2013). However, others involved in policy-making at the Land-level
have suggested that the Forum was marginal: the press did not take much notice, and aside of the Ganztagschulen proposal, neither did the KMK. Many of the policy ideas, such as standard-setting, improvements to teacher training, and greater investment in early childhood education, were already being discussed in the KMK and elsewhere (Vieluf interview 2013). Furthermore, one of the Forum’s key recommendations, to re-establish a national education council [Bildungsrat] to monitor education, was simply a non-starter. Klaus Klemm, one of two academics who sat on the Forum, was more judicious and suggested that involvement of a weak and ineffectual BLK undermined the Forum’s credibility. He was no less adamant that – despite his own prominent role – the Forum was indeed a marginal venue for the reforms that emerged in late 2001 and 2002 (Klemm interview 2013). The Forum was not taken seriously – and even actively marginalized – by the Länder Ministers of Education. It is likely that no matter how brilliant the proposals emerging from the Forum, their frame would have been ignored by the KMK, as Bund venues for policy discussions were not sought. There was already a trusted set of policy advisors who had been working on education reforms for years, and who had an interest in keeping policy deliberations inside the KMK committee structure.

139 In the words of one observer: “Zehetmair was only there to ensure that the Forum Bildung did not try to actually do anything!” (Schweitzer interview 2014). This same civil servant remarked that even Ministers from SPD Länder did not like Bulmahn – there was the perception that she was seeking publicity for her Ganztagschulen project in order to promote policies of gender equality, more so than for educational improvement (ibid.). With further perspective on this, a former high-level union leader and now politician suggested that the scope of political ‘horse-trading’ was more than just policy-seeking over issues of gender equality. Instead, it was about trading away education policy for more control over environmental policy-making. Political parties in the Länder, both right and left, were against losing any policy competence, especially in education where they were more sovereign. The Federal SPD wanted more control over education policy, but recognized that they could not press for more governance powers in too many policy areas. So, “the SPD [at the Federal level] wanted Bund involvement in education, but they made a compromise. They compromised with their coalition partners [Alliance ’90/The Greens], because the Greens very much wanted the Bund to be heavily involved in environmental policy-making, to create national standards in regards to environmental practices. The [Federal] SPD sacrificed education for environmental policy” (Anon 5 interview 2014). Another politician involved at the time stridently denied that this was the case (Anon 14 interview 2014). Whatever the motivations for Ganztagschulen, partisan or otherwise, this initiative did not increase the influence of Bundes-bodies in education despite the funding attached to it.
3.5.4 Venue Control as Causal Mechanism

The PISA shock presented a window of opportunity for the policy dialogue to move elsewhere: to the Bundestag or other Bund venues, to the German Constitutional Court, or for each Landtag to work out their own separate policy response. There were attempts by Bund actors and opposition political parties in Landtags to draw attention to school structure or poor governance, yet the reform agenda remained the purview of the KMK. Furthermore, the KMK had already secured explicit or implicit support from the large teachers’ associations. Thus, the KMK committee structure remained the site for intensive policy discussions regarding ‘results-oriented’ education. For example, the KMK initiated a national study modeled on PISA testing, called PISA-Ergänzung or ‘PISA-E’. This supplementary national assessment explicitly compared Länder to one another, and was used to set binding standards. The results of PISA-E were not published until December 2002 – after the federal election – and demonstrated gross inequities between the Länder. B-Länder (and Bavaria in particular) compared quite favourably to A-Länder, and these findings were used to support arguments for continuing with tripartite school structures and decentralized educational governance. According to ‘state’ researchers within the oligopoly, control of the reform process by the KMK was by then a foregone conclusion anyway, as

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140 This support derived from the emphasis on establishing a rubric of quality assurance and standard-setting for education systems as a whole, not narrow school and classroom-related educational targets (KMK 2002a, 2002b, 6–9). Teachers’ associations did not initially challenge the KMK agenda in public because the policy image did not heap blame on teachers, and even promised more resources for education systems, thereby improving teachers’ work conditions. By 2005, the GEW was again publicly criticizing the selective school system (the tripartite structure) and suggesting that a focus on standards alone was insufficient (GEW 2005). By this time, standard-setting and external evaluations had been consolidated. A KMK official suggested that teachers did not yet understand how the new quality assurance mechanisms could help their praxis: “The empirical turn benefited Ministries more than individual teachers, they didn’t know what to do with this type of information to improve their teaching” (Anon 3 interview 2014). An IQB researcher had a different perspective: some teachers were disgruntled about the lack of consultation over specific reforms, but teachers were nonetheless integrated into the standard-setting process: “teachers [have been] involved in the development of standardized testing. The IQB does not hire psychologists or psychometricians to devise and develop test questions. We hire practising teachers, because they know the curriculum and what is appropriate” (Richter interview 2014).

141 The fact that Bavaria still compared unfavourably to other parts of the world was seemingly forgotten. Some tried to point out that Bavaria was still ‘the Bremen of the OECD’ (Bremen ranked last out of sixteen Länder in the PISA-E study), but this frame was ignored both by the KMK and by much of the public (Klemm interview 2013).
policy-makers were now more interested in what PISA-E data revealed than what had been learned from PISA-I (Anon 2 interview 2013; Klieme interview 2014). Development of quality assurance policy remained firmly the remit of the national oligopoly, and this was exemplified by the attention paid to inter-Länder comparisons (PISA-E), and the commitment to establishing a national standard-setting agency (the IQB). Meeting in the Amtschefskommission and KMK committee structure, the oligopoly could control the policy conversation, and thus managed the form and direction of policy change during the punctuation in the policy equilibrium.

3.6 Alternative Explanations for the German Case

The argument above outlines how sectoral institutions were the key determinant for policy change and policy stability in Germany, so rival explanations must also account for both these dimensions. For each alternative, I evaluate the source of change (international ideas or domestic partisanship) as well as the source for continuity (how ideas were managed in a domestic context; how Ministers strategized to realize fixed partisan preferences). A focus on institutions does not imply that ideas and interests were not important. However, I argue that these other factors were more salient before or after the initial PISA shock, and that it was the national policy oligopoly that was the critical explanatory factor immediately preceding, and during, the punctuation in the equilibrium.

142 These solutions operated within the aegis of collaborative federalism. The IQB was established to assess and evaluate education systems, not to prescribe policy, permitting the Länder Ministries freedom of action in implementing standards. A high administrator at the IQB admitted that the most they could do was push politicians to put certain topics on the agenda, which he referred to as the generalized ‘agenda-setting function of research’ (which I characterize as part of agenda-management): “We cannot control the agenda, but we can define problems and warn politicians and policy-makers that a problem is imminent. The IQB publicizes its own data and evidence, in the hopes that it is not instrumentalized for a particular political or policy agenda” (Anon 2 interview 2014). However, the public and media have paid scant attention to this data since the PISA shock – nor do they understand much of it. Understanding how data gets instrumentalized might be a bridge too far for most observers of education anyway, especially if it seems that appropriate action is being taken.
3.6.1 International Policy Transfer and an Advocacy Coalition Framework

If managed reform in Germany was driven by ideas, then we would expect theories of education, expert knowledge, and supporting evidence to feature prominently during the episode of reform. This also implies that key policy-makers – Länder Ministers of Education – were using knowledge and theories ‘instrumentally’ (i.e., they were learning), and not ‘symbolically’ (i.e., ideas as ‘cover’ to substantiate existing preferences or legitimize authority) (see Boswell, 2009). Learning can still be a part of the policy-making process without being the critical mechanism which explains this form of policy change during this particular episode.\footnote{Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how ideas and learning could not be a part of a significant policy change. However, learning in terms of a general enlightenment does not drive specific change because policies must be designed. A prominent education researcher alluded to the enlightenment function of international comparisons: “In many ways, the German lack of awareness was the problem. There has long been this self-perception of greatness, that we were global providers of culture and expertise (such as the Humboldt university tradition), that Germany had nothing to learn from other cultures” (Anon 15 interview 2014). Nor does learning in terms of a slow accretion of understanding explain sudden transformations of policy. One of the ‘PISA popes’, Manfred Prenzel, observed that there was a learning process, but it was over a prolonged period (before and after the PISA shock) and occurred lower in the ministerial hierarchy, “at levels below the political” (Prenzel interview 2014). Moreover, symbolic use of knowledge and expertise seems to be a persistent pattern in acute education policy change. According to one prominent expert who was frequently consulted by government: “There are consultations, but there is no systematic involvement of experts in policy design. I have sat on a number of advisory boards. [Government actors] ask questions that suit their own political agenda, but they do not invite experts to be involved in a collaborative process of defining the problems and coming up with workable solutions. That would take away their authority to act decisively” (Anon 15 interview 2014). It might be more accurate to say that experts are not systematically consulted, as politicians certainly see that select consultation with experts makes their policy choices more credible.}

For an ideational explanation to have more explanatory leverage than the agenda-management account here, then a transnational transfer of policy ideas should account for policy change, and a domestic advocacy coalition managing and controlling ideas should account for policy stability.

\textit{International Policy Transfer}

The transfer of policy ideas from the OECD to a domestic German context has already been suggested by the ‘internationalization of education policy’ literature, although the degree to which this was actually policy learning rather than just discursive convergence or other forms of emulation is up for debate (for
example, see Ertl 2006). A hoop test for this theory would be evidence of transnational actors functioning as transmission belts between international organizations and domestic policy-makers. In some respects, Jürgen Baumert and his research team at the MPIB were precisely this kind of transnational actor, connecting the OECD to the KMK. Baumert was part of a transnational epistemic community and was exposed to international best practice through his involvement with TIMSS and PISA in Germany. Indeed, the fact that Baumert was involved early in the policy design process, and largely defined the problems for the KMK, appear as even more compelling evidence of a transnational learning process.

However, the degree to which this was real learning, or transnational, comes into question. For one, outside the Amtschefskommission, policy-makers had a weak understanding of the problems defined by Baumert, and only reacted to the poor PISA ranking. Second, PISA (and German researchers associated to it) had greater legitimacy because they were international, but international ideas or evidence were not well-incorporated into the policy designs that emerged from the KMK. The PISA model (with Finland as poster child) was not well adhered to with the German policy reforms, because ‘global best practice’ such as comprehensive schooling or high levels of school autonomy were a fundamental challenge to the belief systems of powerful actors in the KMK. Moreover, many experts and civil servants reported that a number of the key action lines in the Catalogue for Action had very little to do with PISA-I, and could not really be justified by it (Kuhn interview 2014; Anon 5 interview 2014; Klemm interview 2013; van Ackeren interview 2013). The most important evidence for policy-

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144 Notably, the EU has little influence in German education politics: “[the EU’s] country-specific recommendations are directed to the national government. There are no formal interactions between the Directorate-General for Education and Culture and the Länder” (Anon 26 interview 2014).

145 “Some of the issues were so complicated, only members of the Amtschefskommission really understood them. When this commission decided something, the two state secretaries (co-chairs of the commission) would go to the Education Ministers in the KMK and present policy prescriptions. Normally, the Ministers would just say, ‘yes, OK’” (Hüfner interview 2014). An administrator at the IQB also lamented that even after PISA was ‘mainstreamed’, politicians still had a weak understanding of it: “Often, policymakers do not understand what the evidence actually says, or what it measures. We need brokerage agencies, which explain scientific findings to the public and to political bodies” (Anon 2 interview 2014).
makers was ‘domestic’. A high administrator at the IQB told me that “the OECD have not had much influence over Länder decision-making. Perhaps the Bund felt this [international] pressure more, but they had few ways to respond because they lacked jurisdiction. German decision-makers look inward to German examples – not outwards to OECD ideas” (Anon 2 interview 2014). For the transfer of policy ideas to be a meaningful explanation, one would anticipate that policy ideas actually transfer with some degree of fidelity. Instead, we see little in the way of adoption of international models, and little evidence of actual learning from these models, at least amongst those setting the reform agenda – the Länder Ministers working together in the KMK.

*Domestic Advocacy Coalition*

For there to be an advocacy coalition that causes policy change, shared beliefs amongst powerful actors must drive reform choices more than fixed (partisan) interests or institutional position. An advocacy coalition framework conceptualizes subsystems as much more open and multilevel than PEF, suggesting that we would see evidence of involvement by myriad actors during the policy development process (including ideational actors with no domestic decision-making power, such academics, journalists, or representatives from international organizations). Although many such actors were discussing PISA and German education, there is little evidence that they were involved in policy design discussions. Many opinion makers (the press, non-specialist academics) were just as shocked as the public when PISA was released, because they had not been privy to the policy design work in KMK committees. International organizations (the OECD and EU) and national actors (the BMBF) were invited into discussions after the reform agenda had been set. And Länder Ministers were even reluctant to share evidence with each

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146 Furthermore, Eckhard Klieme, one of the ‘PISA-popes’, echoed this when he mentioned that politicians and policy-makers were far more interested in trying to understand the national comparative assessments that came later (Klieme interview 2014). PISA-E (the national inter-Länder comparison) was not conducted until 2002, the results emerging fully a year after the Catalogue for Action had already been established.
other.\textsuperscript{147} This behaviour demonstrated how Ministers in the KMK made efforts both before and after the Catalogue for Action to restrict access to the institutions of policy design, not expand them and encourage the flow of ideas. In macro-political arenas, we do not see the types of ideational competition and advocacy, nor policy brokerage, that one anticipates with an Advocacy Coalition Framework.

The other dimension of an advocacy coalition is that there is a coalition: if ideas are meaningful for policy outcomes, then all formal veto players must at least share the ideas that led to policy change. Evidence of this ‘hoop test’ is clear in the policy outcomes themselves: Ministers of Education seemed to share an idea about secondary aspects of policy, albeit not core or paradigmatic policy beliefs regarding school structures or homogeneity of learning groups. However, their commitment to ideas about instrumentation seemed betrayed by spotty implementation. There was a persistent instrumentation constituency during the punctuation, as Ministers approved national standards and created institutions to evaluate and monitor them. However, the commitment to standard-setting and evidence-based policy waned as monitoring mechanisms grew expensive and standards restricted policy actors’ room for manoeuvre.\textsuperscript{148} While it is impossible to know precisely what motivated each actor to agree at the time, evidence suggests that some actors agreed to policy changes in order to avoid blame or claim credit, then later dragged their feet during implementation.

\textsuperscript{147} This was why, according to expert observers, PISA-E was immediately replaced by (Länder-conducted) VERA tests: so that each Länder could regain local control over the evidence-gathering process. No Minister was enthusiastic about releasing results to researchers or even each other (Ulbricht interview 2014; Anon 1 interview 2013).

\textsuperscript{148} Researcher Isabell van Ackeren observed: “Indeed, for a significant period of time after PISA, politicians were motivated to gather data about the education system, in a way they weren’t before...[But] such extensive data-gathering is unlikely to continue in the future – the Minister of Education for NRW has signalled that this system of tests and measurements is very expensive, and we know that schools do not use this data...Furthermore, the attitude of the leadership in the GEW has changed. Pre-PISA they recognized that they could not afford to resist these developments, and even supported increased interaction between policy and science. Now they see the debate becoming re-politicized” (van Ackeren interview 2013). Also within Bavaria, there has been increasing skepticism regarding evidence-based policy-making: “the empirical turn was accepted by politicians in the early 2000s. It resulted in an intensive cooperation between the politicians and the scientists, but since then, policy-makers grew frustrated because empirical research does not tell them what policies to make” (Hüfner interview 2014). A Bavarian official also told me that many in the Ministry felt that the “empirical turn was dubious, because solutions were not always directly linked to evidence” (Anon 10 interview 2014).
The most compelling behavioural evidence for changing beliefs or ideas would be if powerful actors joined a coalition advocating for policies that went against their expressed preferences, or created policies that diminished their power in political or policy-making institutions. For example, all-day schooling seemed to contradict the values of the Bavarian government, yet given the slow rate of implementation (and the fact that the financial burden was taken up by the BMBF) the Bavarian Education Ministry need not be troubled by it. The establishment of a national standard-setting body meant a compromise in political power for all Länder, and thus very powerful and conservative Länder – like Bavaria – would need to be convinced by compelling ideas in order to agree. However, the nature of standard-setting, and the nature of the standard-setting institutions, posed little political threat to Bavaria. The fact that Bavaria excelled compared to other Länder (in PISA-E) was leverage for Bavaria regarding the standard-setting process. What is more, as a key Bavarian education consultant claimed, “all Länder could agree on something like national standards, because each one has handled them differently. For example, when I speak to [Bavarian teachers-in-training] about standards, they say: ‘standards? We’ve never heard of them!’ The most important instrument for teaching is the curriculum” (Anon 7 interview 2014).149 If there was an advocacy coalition in Germany, it formed after the initial PISA shock due to the broad societal consensus that reforms were inevitable. However, there is little conclusive evidence that there was a pre-PISA advocacy coalition which induced powerful actors to fundamentally change their ideas regarding education or policy instruments, beyond the fact that the logic of standard-setting would be pragmatic, and politically expedient for all involved.

149 In some subsystems and academic circles, there have been ongoing but relatively quiet debates about how to align curriculum to standards. Dirk Richter at the IQB put it this way: “One could hypothesize that the ministries do not want to know exactly how standards and curricula align, because then national standards would determine local curriculum. At the end of the day the Länder can always do what they want when it comes to implementing standards or setting curriculum. There are no rules or punishments for this” (Richter interview 2014).
3.6.2 Partisan Politics and Competition in Macro-Political Arenas

If managed reform in Germany was driven by partisan interests, then we would expect political parties and their interest group allies to feature prominently during the reform episode. This implies that Länder Ministers of Education strategized to achieve partisan policy preferences, and that federal or sectoral institutions were merely instrumental to the achievement of partisan interests. Electoral interests can still motivate these decision-makers, but for the partisan-politics explanation to have more explanatory leverage than an agenda-management model, parties and their allies should drive policy change, and competition in macro-political arenas should temper it.

Partisan Policy Development Institutions.

If political parties are to account for policy change in Germany, then these organizations must have the capacity to develop education policies with electoral considerations in mind. There are two ways to access (or engage) voter opinion on education policy choices: directly through opinion polling, or indirectly via cooperation with ideologically-affiliated interest groups. As it was exceedingly rare – at least prior to PISA - for education to be a high-salience electoral issue in Germany, parties did not poll or solicit opinions from the general public or their ‘lay’ membership. Instead, parties represented particular ideological policy positions to the electorate. When education policy was mentioned at all during elections, it pertained to traditional issues of the German policy legacy: school structures and funding.

To develop a position on these issues, parties cooperated with various peak associations. The tripartite structure of German education had created durable ideological alignments between political parties and teachers’ groups at both the sub-national and national levels. There is some evidence that education policies were developed with the machinery of party politics in mind. However, more compelling evidence – such as reform choices that conformed to past (partisan) policy choices or
electoral promises of that party – does not exist.\textsuperscript{150} The transformation of quality assurance instruments had never been an issue before, at least on the macro-political agenda. Despite institutional and behavioural evidence that (general) preferences were developed vis-à-vis party machinery and strategic cooperation, there is little evidence that these particular reforms were discussed or developed \textit{outside} of government. Incumbents were motivated to avoid blame or claim credit for reforms during the initial PISA shock, but they did this without specific direction on instrumentation from their parties.

\textit{Macro-Political Arenas of Competition}

Political parties cooperate with allies in private settings, but are expected to compete with other parties (and their allies) in public settings. For reforms to be decided by partisan politics, we would anticipate that macro-political venues would be a site for credit claiming by some and blame shifting by others. The minimum indicator would be that these issues were on the macro-political agenda (i.e., discussed during elections, debated in legislatures and covered by the press). This was patently true after 2001 PISA rankings were revealed. Before PISA however, education policy failure was discussed only in low profile and relatively closed venues: The \textit{Forum Bildung}, the KMK, and in select Länder Ministries of Education (such as Hamburg). Certainly, the timing of the Catalogue for Action, a mere 48 hours after the release of PISA rankings, suggests that the KMK wanted to circumvent fulsome debate on education reform.

The most compelling evidence for a partisan-politics explanation, that reforms were actually determined via robust parliamentary debate or electoral competition, is not strong. Of course, there were discussions in sub-national legislatures about the policy agenda presented by Education Ministers, ...
but debates revolved around how to implement the necessary reforms, rather than whether national standards (and improved teacher-training, etc.) were appropriate policies. As for electoral campaigning, credit-claiming and blame-shifting came after reforms were already underway. One journalist commented that “after PISA, education policy was an issue for electoral politics at the Land-level” (Anon 1 interview 2013). PISA had politicized education in Germany, but along very different lines than the conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s: “parties had to rethink their argumentation and even their ideologies, [asking themselves], ‘is it only school structure that is the problem in Germany, or are there other issues?’” (Prenzel interview 2014). Once the new policy status quo was established, political parties staked positions and fought over them in the venues where they traditionally competed.

3.7 Conclusions from the German Case

The agenda-management model establishes that a policy oligopoly is a highly likely condition for significant change in instrumental logic, during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium caused by acute external pressure and the need for government executives to set a reform agenda. I substantiated this claim by first introducing Germany as a case. I discussed the political, policy and historical contexts which established the antecedent conditions and status quo just before the reform episode. The

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151 The Catalogue for Action was presented to all the Landtags as more or less a fait accompli. A high level civil servant in the Bavarian Ministry explained: “having the support of all the Länder Ministers in the KMK certainly helped in this regard. This support did not necessarily help in the daily work [designing and implementing policies], but it did help in political conversations such as in the Landtag or with the teachers’ associations. That there was unanimity in the KMK was important for pressuring groups to accept the need for reform. They could not say that it was simply a case of Bavaria adopting its so-called ‘old-fashioned approach’. We could point to A-Länder and show that they also saw the need for change” (Anon 9 interview 2014).

152 This was confirmed by a prominent education researcher: “after PISA, education became more and more important politically. Parties attacked one another on the basis of their educational record. Education and schooling became very important during elections” (Prenzel interview 2014). And further reinforced by sub-national elections after the initial PISA shock. The CSU won a landslide victory in the 2003 Bavarian state election, the strongest electoral victory of any German party in history, in part by touting its record on education. The CSU seemed to overreach, however, because its subsequent education policies (such as shortening the duration of the Gymnasium) were very unpopular. In 2008, they suffered their worst electoral defeat of the post-war era, and were forced to govern in a coalition with the FDP. In the 2005 state election in NRW, the SPD lost power for the first time in forty years. A number of issues had made the SPD unpopular, but opponents also pointed to the poor results in PISA-E as an indication of the SPD’s record on education.
punctuation in the German policy equilibrium was then marked by the release of PISA results in December 2001, with the national policy agenda (the Catalogue for Action) emerging only two days later. These policies included a significant reform of instrumental logics away from regulatory control and towards standard-setting at the national level. This form of policy change occurred because there was a policy oligopoly at the national level. How this subsystem managed the agenda was vis-à-vis framing and venue control, mechanisms which stabilized the reform episode and the type of policy change. When compared to alternative explanations that emphasize ideas or interests, the agenda-management model provides a superior account, and supports the theoretical proposition that an oligopoly is likely sufficient for a significant change in instrumental logic.

The German case contributes to our knowledge of a Punctuated Equilibrium Framework by demonstrating that the patterns of change during reform episodes can be shaped by the institutional properties of policy subsystems. For one, German education reform suggests that the leptokurtic pattern of policy change can be nuanced by considering more intermediate degrees of policy change. What is more, an analysis of subsystem politics in Germany allows a more general claim about how the political status quo can remain powerful even during periods of seeming crisis and failure. The agenda-management model tells us why subsystem stability translates into subsystem durability: because instrumental policy change offered a solution to a shared political problem. Whether or not a standards-based instrumental logic actually solved the policy issues that PISA data revealed was not altogether clear in the early 2000s. However, this form of policy change seemed to settle a political issue implicitly raised by PISA rankings: who would control the reform agenda and were they up to the task? The change to instrumental logic demonstrated that Länder Ministers and the KMK would continue to set the policy agenda, and oligopoly actors had authority to manage it.
Chapter 4: French Education and an Unstable Policy Monopoly

4.1 Introduction

The French policy response to a poor PISA ranking was markedly different from Germany. Rather than a quick and coordinated policy response, government and corporate actors engaged in a protracted and fractious public debate over reforms. Eventually, in late 2010, the National Ministry of Education (MEN) began to implement small policy changes for upper secondary schooling, fully three years after the release of poor PISA results in December 2007, and more than three years beyond Nicolas Sarkozy’s election as President on a platform of public sector reform. This outcome – a comparatively minor set of changes dubbed ‘Lycée pour tous’ [upper secondary school for all] – was the result of a reform bill that Education Minister Luc Chatel presented to the National Assembly in October of 2009. The events leading up to this, throughout 2008 and 2009, were not indicative of stable policy subsystem working out the parameters of reform internally. The policy design process and subsequent (disorderly) reform episode took on the qualities of a street fight. Actors vied for control over portrayal of reforms, arguments spilled out of conventional policy-making arenas and ‘casualties’ were inflicted along the way. One such casualty was the Education Minister himself. Chatel’s predecessor, Xavier Darcos, had framed an ambitious reform agenda in light of poor PISA results, yet was forced to resign by President Sarkozy because of street demonstrations and an inability to garner support from policy users – teachers especially. The initial reforms proposed by Darcos in late 2008, dubbed ‘Lycée à la carte’ [upper secondary school of choice], would have significantly changed the structure, funding, and quality assurance mechanisms of French secondary schooling. However, the lack of support – indeed the public hostility – of important educational stakeholders scuppered not only the possibility of a structural reform of secondary schooling, but also any significant change in instrumental logic.
The punctuation lasted approximately three years, from 2007 until 2010, before education policy settled again into a stable equilibrium. That *Lycée pour tous* took this long and involved so much conflict and compromise is surprising given the initial circumstances in 2007. Sarkozy’s Union for a Popular Movement party (UMP) had won the 2007 elections handily, with a mandate for public sector reform and an electoral outcome that removed many of the formal impediments to enacting their policy preferences. What is more, the poor PISA results released in December 2007 seemed to demonstrate the need for the transformation of education. Yet the outcome during this puncture were the ‘obstructed reforms’ manifest in Chatel’s *Lycée pour tous*, a policy agenda considerably diluted from the initial preferences of the central government. Following strikes, demonstrations, a ministerial resignation, and further consultation with stakeholders, Minister Chatel proposed watered down (or ‘obstructed’) reforms, policies which ensured greater pedagogical flexibility rather than a transformation of education programs or evaluation policies.

In this chapter, I present empirical evidence for the causes of these ‘obstructed reforms’ in France, in which policy outputs reflected a much lower degree of change than initially desired by the government. The proximate cause for this was the lack of a stable policy subsystem in France. Because France had a very different historical and political context than Germany, the sectoral institutions of policy design had developed more like a monopoly, with fewer actors involved and the (mistaken) assumption of shared abstract aims. When the policy status quo was discredited in late 2007, the process of policy design revealed the instability of this subsystem and the lack of cohesiveness regarding interpretations of the issues. A turbulent and disorderly policy-making process ensued. Government actors in the subsystem wished to quickly transform French secondary schools and quality assurance systems, and just as quickly move the management of implementation back into the subsystem. Pressure participants (major teachers’ unions) felt that they had been ignored during the design of policy, so they forced the debate out of conventional policy-making venues to find a more sympathetic
audience. With the unstable subsystem having failed to manage the reform agenda, and pressure participants having succeeded with their venue-shopping gambit, the situation reverted to more of an agenda-setting dynamic of policy change (the conventional model in the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework). The agenda-setting model anticipates destruction of the policy monopoly, a degree of non-linear causality, and unpredictable policy change outcomes (in this case negligible rather than significant change). However, an agenda-management model pertained during the early phase of the punctuation in the policy equilibrium, and this theory establishes that an unstable subsystem decreases the likelihood for a significant change to the instrumental logic of education policy. As a negative case of re-instrumentation, the French case cannot prove the veracity of an agenda-management model, but makes plausible the argument that subsystem politics mattered for intermediate forms of policy change.

This chapter is divided into seven sections, beginning with this introduction. Section Two examines the features of French education politics and policy prior to the punctuation in the equilibrium, as well as how external pressures manifested themselves. Section Two establishes the antecedent (scope) conditions, and demonstrates that context was important in France just as in Germany, with institutions and past policies fundamentally shaping the preferences and strategies of actors. Section Three describes how French policy changed – or failed to change – during this punctuation in the policy equilibrium. It demonstrates how the initial reform program by Darcos was quite radical, yet the eventual policies put forward by Chatel exhibited more continuity with the past, involving some new evaluation techniques but largely the same governance logic as before. Sections Four and Five present the core of the argument. Section Four begins with a discussion of how the policy subsystem evolved during the 1990s and 2000s, emerging as unstable by 2008. This section then provides evidence of this unstable ‘monopoly’: its structure, the (mis-)understandings regarding shared policy image, and inability to manage conflict internally. Section Five explains the effect of this unstable subsystem: the struggles to manage the reform agenda; the struggles to control the venues of debate;
and the relationship between image, venue, and obstructed reform. Section Six considers alternative explanations for the obstructed transformation of policy instruments. The chapter concludes with a summation of the implications of the French case for an agenda-management model, and for the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework.

4.2 Historical Background

In this section, I contextualize and establish the antecedent conditions for a punctuation in the French educational policy equilibrium. Political institutions, policy legacies and historical timing mattered very much for establishing a resilient status quo and shaping the preferences and behaviour of powerful actors. The political context of French educational policy-making gave the appearance of high reform capacity due to a lack of formal veto players, with decision-making power concentrated in the hands of the elected executive aided by a centralized educational bureaucracy. However, this executive dominance was countered with a degree of informal veto power by those charged with policy implementation, manifest in a corporate-syndicalist union culture alongside the rationalization and segmentation of the bureaucracy. The policy context of French education was markedly different than that of Germany, yet just as entrenched. Schooling in France was based on the principles of secular Republicanism, and was structured to be egalitarian (vis-à-vis comprehensive schools), yet in practice, the system was rife with contradictions and internal tensions. The historical context leading up to the punctuation meant that the equilibrium was facing acute external pressure, but of a slightly different sort than in Germany. Like Germany, there was pressure due to poor economic performance and cumulated evidence from international assessments, but unlike Germany, this led to a kind of perennial low-grade politicization of education issues, even during periods of equilibria. Finally, looking at evaluation policy and quality assurance mechanisms, these policies were much further developed in France than in Germany. French quality assurance was characterized by ‘sedimentation’, a convoluted yet disconnected set of evaluation policies that was capable of measuring multiple variables and
components of the system, yet not sophisticated enough to evaluate educational processes or guide policy design. As we shall see in the section below, the political and social institutions involved in French compulsory education, coupled with the historical moment, empowered the Élysée (the office of the President) to set a significant reform agenda in late 2007, and carry it out. Moreover, the background conditions also seemed to provide space for sectoral policy-making institutions to design policies and manage the reform agenda. Their failure to do was due to the structure and stability of the subsystem.

4.2.1 Political Context: The Structure and Culture of French (Educational) Policy-making

Comparing the political context to Germany, the Second World War was an interregnum for French educational policy-making rather than a cataclysm, with the structure and culture of French education politics already permeated by both hierarchy and rationalization. Executive power was concentrated and centralized, yet a segmented bureaucracy and strong corporate groups could be informal veto players for some policy proposals. Because of these orthogonal forces, real institutional change in French education was seldom easy and rarely profound. The key features of French education politics: executive power, bureaucratization, statism, and corporate-syndicalism, have led some to conclude that ‘plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose’.

4.2.1.1 The Structure of Education Politics: Concentrated and Centralized Executive

Concentrated Executive Power

A key structural feature of French educational policymaking is the concentration of power within the executive branch of government. The executive cabinet (the Matignon) set the general policy agenda for the executive, decided how policy will be designed, and proposed draft legislation to parliament. Education bills must receive assent from both houses in the legislative branch (the Assemblée Nationale and the Sénat). Under some circumstances, legislation must also undergo judicial review.153

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153 The structures of French education policy-making are much more elaborate than presented here, especially regarding the committee structure in the legislative branches, and the somewhat ambiguous rules for
Nonetheless, major education policies emanated from the executive branch of government, typically announced by the Minister of Education with the support of the President. The Élysée (office of the President) had been steadily strengthened since the founding of the Fifth Republic in 1958, including two significant constitutional reforms during the 2000s.¹⁵⁴ For the administration of President Sarkozy, the president was not only the pre-eminent agenda-setter, he could also dominate law-making vis-a-vis a fait majoritaire government. Under these conditions, if President Sarkozy (or his ministers) could merely avoid legislation that was grossly unpopular or challenged the constitution, then the number of formal (de jure) veto players was effectively reduced to zero.

**Bureaucratic Centralization**

France has been emblematic of a centralized, Weberian ‘strong state’ (King and Le Gâles 2011). Power emanating from the offices of the National Ministry of Education [Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale] (MEN) on Rue de Grenelle in Paris. The structure of educational policy design concentrated this power in the hands of the Minister, who then appointed a team of trusted personal advisors, the cabinet. There were some attempts at political decentralization in the early 1980s, in which regional territories’ elected governments were given limited autonomy and responsibility over education. However, strong resistance to decentralization by teachers’ unions ensured that regionally-elected officials or their appointees were given very limited competence – essentially only budget allocation for infrastructure. The MEN in Paris was the source of education policy, legislated or otherwise (as decrees and circulars).

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¹⁵⁴ The two constitutional reforms (the quinquennat and revision of Article 49.3 of the Constitution) concentrated power in the hands of the President. These reforms decreased the likelihood of cohabitation (where the president and prime minister are from different political parties, and in which legislative gridlock often ensues) and encourage fait majoritaire governments (where the president and prime minister are from the same political party and can govern cooperatively). It also gave the President special powers to force through ‘executive orders’.
Yet the MEN was not as monolithic as it appeared. Power was concentrated but also rationalized, such that the bureaucracy was segmented according to school ‘cycles’ (primary, etc.), territorial units, and into ‘vertical’ hierarchies. The first division pertained to operations rather than policymaking, and is not discussed further here. The second, a kind of administrative decentralization (also known as ‘deconcentration’), created a measure of regional and school-level autonomy without abrogating the central executive’s ultimate responsibility for designing education policies and managing the system as a whole. The third rationalization divided education into two ‘vertical’ hierarchies: an administrative hierarchy and a pedagogical hierarchy, each with their own objectives and modes of action, and coexisting without much interpenetration. The pedagogical hierarchy was primarily concerned with curriculum, programming, pedagogy, and issues like school structure (i.e., the ‘old world’ of quality assurance, focussed on education inputs). Within this hierarchy, the Minister made programmatic policy decisions after being advised by his cabinet, ministerial bureaucrats, and consultative councils of experts and stakeholders. The administrative hierarchy was primarily

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155 It has been one of the enduring myths of the French educative state that the Minister merely checks her watch in Paris to know which page of a textbook a student is reading in Marseille. French education has never been this regimented, despite efforts at standardization going back to the era of nation- and state-building during the late 19th century (Weber 1976).

156 To avoid confusion with political decentralization, administrative decentralization is here referred to as deconcentration (Gregersen et al. 2004, 4). Deconcentration refers to “the transfer of administrative responsibility for specified functions to lower levels within the central government bureaucracy, generally on some spatial basis” (Ferguson and Chandrasekharan 2005, 64). Note that this refers to a transfer of responsibilities, and not merely the reproduction of central government at the regional or local level for the sake of efficiency (and with very little subsidiarity). As with political decentralization, teachers’ unions successfully resisted many deconcentration measures, seeing them as threats to their interests and values.

157 Ministerial departments included the Department General of School Education (Direction Générale de l’Enseignement Scolaire or DGESCO) or through school inspections conducted by the powerful General Inspectorate (Inspection Générale de l’Éducation Nationale or IGEN). During the time period under analysis, the Councils included the Superior Council for Education (CSE) and the High Council for Education (HCE). The CSE was composed of 98 persons elected or nominated from corporate stakeholder groups, regional representatives, research groups, and civic employees. The CSE was the voice of civil society and regional government, and a vehicle for teachers’ unions to have their voices heard in policy design decisions. The HCE was composed of nine government appointees who consulted with a broader group of educational experts (including teachers and teachers’ unions), and they were compelled to publish their annual recommendations. It was replaced in 2013 by the Conseil supérieur des programmes (CSP), amidst complaints that the HCE was too partisan in composition and advising function (van Zanten interview 2014).
concerned with system administration and evaluation (i.e., the ‘new world’ of quality assurance involving measurement of education outputs). In this hierarchy, the Minister could consult with his cabinet, the Department of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance (the DEPP), and then issued directives to school principals via regional rectors’ offices and administrative inspectors (inspecteurs d’académie). This internal segmentation of roles and responsibilities led to competition and ‘politicking’ between departments, and had profound implications for quality assurance.

4.2.1.2 Culture of Education Politics: Statism and Corporatist-syndicalism.

The general mode of public sector governance in France has encouraged the incorporation of powerful interest groups into policy-making (Baumgartner and Walker 1989). However, different policy areas have developed unique dynamics for involving stakeholders, prompting some analysts to qualify French public policy as ‘sectoral-corporatist’. This can be further divided into sectors which are ‘social corporatist’, dominated by professionalized interest groups whose power emanating from cultural authority or legitimacy, and ‘technical corporatist’, dominated by technocratic elites in the civil service or civil society (Elgie and Griggs 2000; Jobert and Muller 1987, 171–206). Policy-making for compulsory education adhered to an antagonistic version of the former which I refer to as ‘corporate-syndicalism’. Over time, there has been a shift to a more technical-corporatist model of policy-making and a burgeoning culture of ‘statism’. Overall, French education politics involved semi-cooperative competition within and between three groups of actors with an outsize role in policy development:

158 Since 1989, the pedagogical hierarchy has become less segmented (i.e., with fewer categories of actors), while the administrative hierarchy has become more segmented. The 1989 Education Act created fewer distinctions between teachers, professionalizing the training programs so that all were recognized as having approximately equivalent pedagogical status. There are still status distinctions between teachers, especially between primary teachers (considered generalists) and different types of secondary teachers (with those passing the agrégé certification considered the highest level of subject specialization, with status and labour conditions similar to post-secondary faculty). Yet in terms of pedagogy, all teachers were now considered experts or professionals. Over the same period, the technical division of labour amongst administrators and inspectors has increased. There are more actors involved in administration, and their roles in the hierarchy have become more stratified.
teachers’ union leadership (corporate actors and pressure participants), high civil servants (state actors), and political appointees (government actors).

**Corporate-syndicalism (a Social-corporatist Model)**

‘Corporate-syndicalism’ refers to a political culture in which a group of stakeholders play an incorporated yet antagonistic role in the development of policy. For historical and structural reasons, teachers’ unions far outstripped the power of other civil society actors, sometimes even having informal veto power over reform proposals. This was due to a history of syndicalism in France (and French education), as well as the relative strength of the union movement in French education, embodied by the (now defunct) Federation for National Education (FEN).

Until the break-up of the FEN in 1992, the National Ministry was careful to incorporate the interests of teachers’ unions into policy design: one might even speak of collusion, in which the state and teachers’ unions formed a tight-knit policy community to the exclusion of other stakeholders. The size and strength of the FEN – along with its defensiveness – earned it the nickname ‘fortress of teachers’ from fearful governments (Buisson-Fenet 2004). However, factionalism also created tensions between teacher groups in the FEN, as well as “institutionalized patterns of conflictual cooperation between the state and teachers” (Dobbins 2017, 96). Thus, the monolithic ‘fortress of teachers’ fragmented during the 1990s, reforming into what Agnès van Zanten has dubbed a pluralistic ‘republic of teachers’ (van Zanten interview 2014). A minority faction associated with the Communist Party was ejected from the FEN, and went on to form the Federation of United Unions (FSU), now the largest and most powerful education union in France. The other major faction that emerged was UNSA Education, the second largest teachers’ union, affiliated to the National Autonomous Trade Union (UNSA) and the Socialist Party. Inter-union rivalry created

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159 Although teacher union density has declined from its peak of over 70% representation during the 1970s to approximately 30% today, it still has twice the representation of public sector unions in France, and six times that of the private sector (Andolfatto and Labbé 2007, 120; European Trade Union Institute 2016). This in a country that has one of the weakest and most fragmented trade union movements in Europe, with only 8.1% of all French employees belonging to a union.
incentives to resist any government reforms, in order to thwart plans that might benefit other groups. This made cooperative relations with the MEN more difficult; “the unions often competed for members on the basis of their unwillingness to cooperate with the government” (Baumgartner 1989, 99).

However, there were also limits to this factionalism, and the ‘republic of teachers’ could sometimes be remarkably resilient and coherent. The relative ideological proximity of teachers’ unions encouraged solidarity (at least in resisting government initiatives) and unions often strategically coordinated strike activities, particularly as a negotiating tactic before the release of a proposal (Cole and John 2001; Frajerman 2008, 544–45). Collectively, teachers rallied around education as a protected public space, with any ‘denationalization’ of education as the ultimate threat to their ideologies and interests. In practice, this meant a general preference for the policy status quo, institutional uniformity (guaranteed by centralized governance), and opposition to any contraction of the education system or closing of schools, even if this meant the sacrifice of wage increases (see Dobbins 2017).

By late 2007, the pressure participants with meaningful influence in the policies discussed here were the two largest unions of secondary school teachers: The Teachers’ Union of UNSA (SE-UNSA) and the National Union of Secondary Schoolteachers within the FSU umbrella (SNES-FSU). For their part, the two major pressure participants (SNES-FSU and SE-UNSA) indeed displayed ideological differences, with variation in their policy goals and political strategies. SNES-FSU was the more radical and leftist union. The power of the SNES-FSU derived from their capacity to mobilize resistance in a rather narrow

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160 Overall, education union density has been declining since the Allègre administration (1997-2000), but SNES-FSU still claims to represent the majority of secondary school teachers because they received a clear majority of votes in professional elections in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2011. For its part, FSU has 165,000 members, 83% of whom are teachers in compulsory education. FSU is the fifth largest union overall, and the second largest public-sector union in France. SE-UNSA represented 75,000 teachers from kindergarten to high school. There were other education unions in France, but they were smaller than FSU and UNSA Education and did not have the same capability to independently advocate for their members’ interests. They included the General Union for National Education within the Socialist Party-affiliated French Democratic Confederation of Labour (SGEN-CFDT), the communist Force Ouvrière (FO), the radical leftist SUD Éducation (SUD), and the conservative National Union for Upper and Lower Secondary within the Syndicated Confederation of National Education (SNALC-CSEN). Notably, almost every union opposed the Darcos reforms, often for different reasons.
and intense way, relying on affiliated unions within the FSU to rally to their causes, and mobilizing concentrated resistance from secondary students.\textsuperscript{161} SE-UNSA had more ideologically centrist policy preferences and advocacy strategies, moderated by the range of their membership.\textsuperscript{162} They wielded a different kind of power than SNES-FSU because they saw themselves as reformist not radical, working through ‘inside’ consultation strategies on the Superior Council for Education (CSE) and via conventional political channels with political connections to the Socialist Party (Roche 2008). An executive at SE-UNSA, put it this way: “we tend to work with the Ministry as much as we can, through ‘the politics of small steps’. We are pragmatic…and build coalitions in the CSE with other progressive groups of teachers, students and parents” (Anon 21 interview 2014). Strikes were not out of the question, but SE-UNSA tended to be more corporatist in their approach.

Other stakeholder groups in education were seldom influential because they lacked experience in policy-making, or the political space to acquire it. Parents’ associations were neither powerful nor reliable allies for other subsystem actors (either teachers’ unions or the state).\textsuperscript{163} More reliable (and radical) were the major students’ unions.\textsuperscript{164} Indeed, it was a kind of rite of passage for students to

\textsuperscript{161} A (union) rival of the SNES-FSU commented, “the power that the SNES has is very much dependent on the students. They manipulate student associations. What the Ministry [of Education] is most afraid of is students out in the street, because the Minister’s worst nightmare would be a student getting injured or killed during a strike or demonstration – which has happened before” (Anon 20 interview 2014).

\textsuperscript{162} SE-UNSA had a high proportion of professeurs certifiés and professeurs agrégés (subject specialists with special status, and thus more conservative). Furthermore, UNSA Éducation represented the largest number of administrative personnel and school inspectors, also a more conservative force in education (the IGEN in particular was very status quo oriented, in the sense they were the defenders of the disciplines, or as Alain Michel referred to them: ‘the guardians of the Temple’ (Michel interview 2014).

\textsuperscript{163} Indeed, high civil servants reported that parents were not considered critical actors in the process (Forestier interview 2014; Gauthier interview 2014). They had parents’ associations that would represent their interests, the two major ones being the slightly conservative Federation of Parents of Children in Public school (PEEP) and the larger and more leftist National Federation of Councils for Students’ Parents (FCPE), which generally supported teachers’ unions. Annabelle Allouch argues that parents increased their influence over policy implementation with the rise of clientelism during the 1980s and 1990s (a facet of New Public Management), but parent associations grew less powerful within education politics during the same period. In part, this was due to the fragmentation of parent associations into smaller and more specialized groups, but also because motivated individual parents were now able to act independently at the local level, by sitting on School Councils (Allouch interview 2014).

\textsuperscript{164} Amongst upper secondary students, the two most powerful unions were UNL (National Union of Secondary Students, formed in 1994 and largest in terms of membership), and FIDL (Independent and Democratic Federation
demonstrate at least once during their years in upper secondary (Norman interview 2014). Students’ unions were a palpable threat to the orderly governance of education reform, but were seldom involved in discussions over policy agendas or policy design. Thus, the only corporate actors with the potential to be meaningful pressure participants in a policy subsystem was the leadership of the most powerful teachers’ unions, and they guarded this power. Michael Dobbins (2017, 93) put it this way: “French educational corporatism should not be understood as an institutionalized balancing of interests. Instead, skeptics may be inclined to speak of an institutionalized platform for ‘teacher rent-seeking,’ often to the detriment of other actors.”

**Statism (a Technical-corporatist model)**

‘Statism’ has been a cultural characteristic of many policy sectors in France, in which the state so dominates civil society that state-society relations take on a *dirigiste* quality: the state as director implementing a ‘science of governing’. The effect of statism was an overdependence on the state for policy expertise, yet underperformance of the state when actually designing policies. The shadow of state hierarchy produced three negative cultural effects: poor capacity-building in civil society, a routinization in the behaviour of state functionaries, and individuals trying to bypass bureaucracy and formal policy. Poor capacity refers to insufficient resources and training for local administrators, school principals especially (Buisson-Fenet interview 2014), as well as Ministerial under-reliance on educational research by academics, who were perceived as highly ideological and lacking objectivity or rigor (Anon 22 interview 2014; Robert interview 2014). Statism also exacerbated the sense of the impersonal, partly the result of a ‘sedimentation’ of policies which produced a degree of infantilization and routine blame avoidance.165 Standardized or routinized behaviours amongst public employees – even for seemingly

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165 For sedimentation, different types of ministerial documents and orders were released as they were prepared, with the result being the ‘stacking’ or ‘sedimentation’ of varied instructions to teachers, administrators, and inspectors, a process which often rendered priorities unclear or even conflicting (van Zanten 2011, 77). Policy
large and meaningful reforms – produced a sense of ‘reformitis’ (‘reformité’), in which French education seemed to be always changing, never changed. Finally, statism tempered how stakeholders – parents especially, but also those wishing to influence policy design – managed their relationship to the state. Those with high levels of cultural capital (who understood the system and had good connections) knew that their interests were better served by bypassing formal policy and official bureaucratic channels.

Due to statism, there was the somewhat illusory impression that a technical-corporatist bureaucracy was responsive to policy problems, when in actuality the state often acted as a brake on innovation.

Conclusions about French Education Politics

The overall effect of the structure and culture of French education politics was a situation where legislating policy was relatively straightforward (under *fait majoritaire*) but implementation was quite complex and cumbersome. Although power was concentrated and centralized, administrative deconcentration and internal segmentation acted as a check on Ministerial power. Bureaucratic foot-dragging and inter-departmental rivalries routinely produced sub-optimal implementation, which often outlasted ministers and sometimes even major pieces of legislation. Corporate-syndicalism, alongside the other cultural feature of French education politics – statism – produced a myriad of orthogonal pressures on policy-making which made it difficult to shift policy away from the status quo. These inertial dynamics resulted in a French education system that has long been characterized as ‘blocked’ (Citron 1971). For example, Socialist Education Minister Claude Allègre began his appointment in 1997

implementers were confused and uncertain about a policy’s purpose, or its coherence with the whole, producing a lack of initiative. In the words of a close observer of French education from the OECD: “There is so much hierarchical reporting that it has an infantilizing effect on those involved. People are afraid to act independently!” (Hugonnier interview 2014).

This even earned its own symbols and codes. Savvy parents, for example, referred to it as using the ‘Système D’, short for *la débrouillardise* or ‘resourcefulness’ (Corbett 1995). This aspect of statism had three effects on policy design: it created (more) inequality inside the education system, it affected the policy design process by distorting the influence of well-placed ‘insiders’ at the expense of official institutional mechanisms (like consultative councils or parliamentary committees), and it provided poor feedback on the efficacy of policies.

Policy implementation has its own inertial dynamics in France, independent of policy formulation equilibria. Roger Duclaud-Williams (1988) found that for education, a ‘bureaucratic inertia thesis’ (Crozier 1976), in which inertia was the product of internal resistance inside the bureaucratic hierarchy, was more evident than a
within a cohabitation government, yet in a press conference he remarked that his biggest challenge
would not be to move President Chirac, but rather, to move ‘the immobile elephant’ – French
educational bureaucracy (Mazeron 2010; Pons interview 2014).

4.2.2 Policy Context: The Structure and Culture of French Education

The policy context not only established the policy equilibrium, it also constructed the paradigms and
interests of educational stakeholders. The roots of modern French education can be traced back to the
Napoleonic era, with a culture of schooling based on secular and egalitarian Republicanism. It was
assumed that school structures formalized this idealized culture, vis-à-vis comprehensive schooling,
positive discrimination, high quality credentials awarded on merit, and high public expenditure. Yet the
culture and structure of French education was also fraught with contradictions; it purported to be
accessible, egalitarian and high quality, yet was latently selective, competitive and inefficient.

4.2.2.1 Culture of French Education: L’une et Indivisible République

The core ideals of French education emerged from the founding principles of the French Republic:
democracy, secularism, and equality, supported by a strong state. More than other nation-states, France
had explicit national aims for education, like accessibility and equity, articulated in cornerstone
documents like the 1946 Langevin-Wallon Plan. Moreover, these principles presupposed (and justified) a
strong role for the state as defender of the Republic. The lived experience of students and teachers,
however, did not always live up to the lofty ideals. According to a former director of the Ministerial
cabinet, Christian Forestier: “we have the best system in the world...for half of our students...it works
well for some, [but as] an heir to the Napoleonic system, it is very elitist and does not know how to

‘peripheral power thesis’ (Grémion 1976), with implementation resistance due to alliances between local actors
and regional bureaucrats (much like ‘la Système D’). One reason for bureaucratic inertia was that education
stakeholders not only had different interests, they had different types of interests. Teachers cared about
distribution of postings (decided centrally), whereas politicians cared about distribution of school construction (a
deconcentrated decision, often susceptible to ‘informal negotiations’).
manage those with learning difficulties” (Forestier interview 2014). As such, PISA results defied expectations about the universal excellence of French education, by demonstrating that social origin was a considerable factor for determining educational outcomes. The persistent mismatch between cultural principles and practice was not newly discovered by PISA testing, but these issues seldom ‘broke out’ of the narrow policy arena. Amongst teachers especially, there was the growing feeling that the Republican principle of equality had been hollowed out since the 1980s, creating socioeconomic stratification, disparities between regions, and more students leaving school without qualifications. Therefore, the argument that leftist teachers’ unions resisted reforms because they were justified by a neo-liberal evaluation regime incongruent with Republican ideals (PISA) is somewhat specious (see Dobbins and Martens 2012). By 2008, ideological camps had already hardened around particular conceptions of Republicanism and the principles of education. L’école Républicaine and PISA were used symbolically, by advocates and opponents alike, as proxies for deeper debates or to mask other ideologies and interests.

4.2.2.2 Structure of the Education System: Comprehensivization and its Inefficiencies

Notwithstanding the seeming erosion of core education principles, many of the structures of French education were built with idealized Republican principles in mind. By the 1990s, the (formal) structures of French schooling could be characterized as highly egalitarian and democratic: free compulsory schooling from six to sixteen (with most children attending from four to eighteen), long school days, rigid catchment areas, comprehensive schools, and positive discrimination for those living in poorer areas.

168 According to Gérard Aschieri, former Secretary General of the Federated Trade Union for Education (FSU): “[Inequality] was the context for change in the 2000’s. The political debate over this was poorly served by Allègre (Minister of Education from 1997-2000), who created a negative discourse and a feeling of defensiveness among teachers...[By the late 2000s] there was increasing inequality across regions and social classes. One could see the development of competition between individual students, and competition between schools. In theory, the education system was supposed to value equality as a fundamental principle, but in practice, competition was encouraged...Successful or renowned schools would capitalize on policies that allowed them to select the best students. The result has been the ‘ghettoization’ of schooling.” (Aschieri interview 2014).
areas. By some measures, this was having the desired effect: a true ‘massification’ of education, and equalization of outcomes. However, these same school structures unintentionally favoured students with high cultural capital, because a key feature of French education that distorted positive effects was *redoublements*, or grade repetition. Thus, the structures of French education supported a Janus-faced culture: equity and democratization as explicit, with selectivity and competition implicit. Amongst educational insiders, the question was: can the Ministry of Education do anything about this? Given the resource-intensity of fundamental reform, did it want to? This directs us to the final structural feature of French education (and a possible motivation behind previous inactivity as well as recent reform attempts): high public expenditure. Spending on public education was well above the OECD average, and according to PISA, did not seem to yield the same ‘return on investment’ as other national education systems. Indeed, poor PISA rankings were symbolically useful for criticizing a number of

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169 A series of laws dating back to the 1950s constructed this educational policy status quo. They included the 1958 Berthoin law which made collèges (lower secondary) accessible to all. The 1975 Haby reforms made the collège comprehensive (unstreamed), and lycées (upper secondary) more accessible. The 1982/3 laws of decentralization established policies of positive discrimination and provided additional resources for schools within ‘Zones of Educational Priority’ (ZEP) of lower socioeconomic status. In 1985, the vocational diploma (*baccalauréat professionnel* or ‘bacc pro’) was established, and targets were set for completion of the *baccalauréat* (80% of a given cohort, by the year 2000). The 1989 Jospin Law reaffirmed graduation targets, and put students ‘at the centre of the education system’ (Art. 23) by rethinking pedagogical approaches and reforming teacher training institutions.

170 Grade repetition is a feature of many education systems, including Germany, but in France it was used as a means of standard-setting and quality control rather than as a summative assessment of student capability. In short, a certain percentage of students were all but assured to fail and repeat a grade. Despite efforts to homogenize learning outcomes (via comprehensive schooling and Zones of Educational Priority), the heterogeneity of learning groups prompted teachers to use grade repetition as a ‘safety valve’ for quality control, protecting their own (or their school’s) reputation. Thus, *redoublements* in France functioned much like differentiated schooling in Germany: as a blame avoidance mechanism for teachers. Former DEPP official, Jean-Claude Émin, explains: “international comparisons were critical for putting grade repetition in a negative light. Prior to PISA, there were few who thought that grade repetition was a bad thing...[For years] the DEPP would struggle to convince actors about [the negative implications of grade repetition], from the inside. It took PISA to convince stakeholders that grade repetition was an issue...[Christian] Forestier had said: ‘repeating is our way of streaming’. It caused a little scandal, but it was true!” (Émin interview 2014)

171 In 1999, expenditure amounted to 7% of French GDP, with over 6% spent on compulsory education. This was largely due to structural features like long school duration and special funding for ZEPs, but also because approximately one quarter of the French population at any given time was involved in education as either students or staff. Sustained high expenditures will create stable interest groups who defend that spending. Yet there were also idiosyncrasies of French education, such as grade repetition and state funding for contracted private (Catholic)
cultural and structural features of the policy status quo in French education. For those concerned with equity, the poor ranking seemed to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of French education. For those concerned with excellence (and the costliness of a system that redistributed resources away from the elite), PISA rankings seemed to demonstrate the inefficiency of French education. As we shall see, this kind of profound disagreement over goals or problems is difficult for a monopolistic subsystem to overcome, whereas other subsystem types can find compromise on instruments.

4.2.3  Historical Context: External Pressure and the Importance of Timing and Cumulation

History mattered because the timing of events or the cumulation of pressure shaped reform possibilities, without overdetermining actual policy change outcomes. If ‘routine’ policy-making refers to incremental adjustments to the status quo, then historical context refers to external impetuses thought to punctuate the policy equilibrium and trigger more transformative change.

In the years leading up to the punctuation in the policy equilibrium, broader socioeconomic trends became political flashpoints during the 2007 French presidential election. There was a sense that France was in economic decline: a recession in the early 2000s exacerbated a growing youth unemployment problem, bringing attention to the poor job-preparedness of baccalaureate-holders and causing malcontent amongst students. A political response to these trends was evident in the 2007 French presidential race. The two main contenders, Nicolas Sarkozy and Ségolène Royal, mounted US-style (personality-driven) campaigns calling for economic renewal, including education reform. Royal, the Socialist Party candidate, sought to re-establish a ‘just order’, including greater investment in education (Noblecourt 2006). Sarkozy, the candidate for the conservative UMP party, distanced himself the unpopular incumbent Jacques Chirac using the slogan ‘rupture’ to describe his vision, a kind of shock treatment that would produce a more efficient public sector and welfare state (Burke 2007; Farrell schools, which made this a particularly expensive sector in France. After public debt financing, the French state spent more on education than anything else (Robert interview 2014; Döbert, Klieme, and Sroka 2004, 219).
2007; Sarkozy promet une “rupture tranquille” 2006). Sarkozy won the election on this mandate, and six weeks later consolidated power with an absolute majority for his UMP party in the National Assembly.

Just days after forming government, Sarkozy introduced to his cabinet the General Revision of Public Policies (RGPP), calling for modernization and streamlining of the welfare state, greater public sector performance and transparency, and greater efficiency in education and other sectors (Figazzolo 2009). Because the Sarkozy administration had pre-existing policy preferences based on efficiency, the public release of the 2006 PISA assessment (in December 2007) provided them with an opportunity and justification to set an educational reform agenda.

In some respects, the lack of responsiveness to previous international assessments was surprising, given that France was heavily involved in designing such assessments during the 1990s. Despite being among the ‘first movers’ in international assessment – particularly those involving the OECD – France seemed to ignore lacklustre results in IALS, TIMSS, and the initial PISA assessments.

There were three reasons for this. The first was corporate-syndicalist resistance to OECD recommendations for decentralization of French education in 1994 (Cole 2001; OECD 1994). The second was the domestic policy legacy and sense of ‘reformitis’ previously described. Having recently reformed the collèges [lower secondary schools] with a significant though not transformative piece of legislation in 2005 (the Fillon law), there was little appetite to reform education again so soon, mediocre results notwithstanding. Third, there was a rationalization that poor results were due to suspect testing methods; the thinking was that TIMSS and IALS produced dubious outcomes because their assessments did not capture the peculiarities of French education. Many officials ignored poor results and continued to believe in the quality of French education: “if, in 1999, I was to ask Ministry officials about where France ranks amongst OECD countries regarding the quality of their education system, they would have said – in all modesty – probably first or second” (Hugonnier interview 2014). Instead, France ranked 12th among 34 OECD countries in the 2000 PISA assessment (with test scores around the average), and
declined to 21st by 2006 (with test scores well below average) – the latter replicating the results that sparked PISA shock in Germany. It was not that the results had become too bad to ignore, because other international assessments in the 1990s showed France even worse off. It was that a political climate conducive to paying attention to poor results was not there during the early 2000s. External pressure did not cumulate enough to initiate a process of social learning, perhaps because the constant low-grade politicization of education issues had drummed out the signal – at least until an agenda-setter in the macro-political arena perceived the pressure as acute.

4.2.4 Quality Assurance in French Education

A poor PISA ranking was contextualized as a critique of the quality of education, as well as a critique of the quality assurance mechanisms in education. French educational quality assurance was well-developed but also convoluted, sedimented, and incapable of providing the type of information politicians sought: non-prescriptive evidence about the learning process.

Logic of Evaluation Policy

Quality assurance in France was highly convoluted due to the sedimentation of different types of evaluation policy. There were attempts to approximate post-regulatory or post-bureaucratic governance, including many new policy tools to facilitate system-steering by education professionals (Pons 2010). As one evaluator in the DEPP recalled, “each year there were new protocols for evaluation and new testing instruments. The evaluation regime was quite heavy for students and teachers” (Anon 17 interview 2014). The sedimentation of policy, and entanglement of types of evaluation, made the

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172 Alain Michel, the French representative to PISA during its development, recalled the reaction of the Minister of Education when they began to discuss PISA 2000 findings: “Suddenly there was PISA, and France was under the average. It was a big shock for some education specialists, but it was not in the press or media because it remained confidential. The [Education] Ministers for the Socialist government, Claude Allègre and then Jack Lang, they knew that they would have to take responsibility for these results. I was at a press conference in 2000 [representing a think tank about a related topic]. During a discussion about education, I mentioned the results emerging from the PISA assessment, and that France was not doing well, below the average. I also said it did not matter so much, because we measure different types of things. Still, the Minister at the time, Allègre, was livid – he told me not to say anything to the press!” (Michel interview 2014)
management of education increasingly complex and opaque. However, what undergirded these overlapping evaluation mechanisms was an older tradition of quality control and state-sanctioned certification. France seemed caught between modes of regulation: not quite a vertical command-and-control hierarchy, nor yet a quasi-market or ‘Evaluative State’. Quality assurance amounted to measurement of particular outcomes – the merit of the outcomes themselves not coming into question – followed by quality control of inputs (i.e., adjustments to the amount or type of inputs). Whereas evidence-based policymaking implies an authority based on something other than formal state power or communal interest representation, French quality assurance actors continued to define their identity – and propose intervention – based on the persistence of a strong regulatory logic. French quality assurance was still being built on three principles: bureaucratic rule (i.e., statism), joint management [cogestion] between government and professional associations (i.e., corporate-syndicalism), and finally, the individual leadership style or charisma of the Minister (van Zanten 2008).

Forms of Evaluation Policy, and Implications

This is not to say that there was any lack of evidence, or a dearth of mechanisms for generating data about the education system. There were mechanisms that assessed the whole system either externally or internally, as well as evaluations of system components, such as students or teachers. Regarding component evaluation, the only real quality assurance mechanism for teaching was pre-service teacher-training and the notoriously difficult but pedagogically-impractical concours (the centralized exams to qualify as a teacher). Following initial training, teachers were assessed by a formal ‘double notation’

\[173\] The Evaluative State attempted to balance centralization and decentralization; increase institutional autonomy; develop a ‘culture of evaluation’; diversify school provision; augment teacher monitoring; and promote parental school choice (see Maroy 2006, 2012).

\[174\] Christian Forestier, a high level civil servant who held a number of roles in educational governance, provided this perspective: “France started to make quantitative objectives in 1985, so it has already been 30 years that we have had these measures. The targets [percentage of baccalaureates, failure rates, and so on] were decided according to political criteria, through a political process, and have remained virtually unchanged for 30 years” (Forestier interview 2014).
inspection procedure, once every seven years. This procedure was not intended to vet the teaching profession, nor serve as a performance review for the purpose of salary scaling, nor as a peer review feedback mechanism to improve pedagogical practice. Yet no other formal performance criteria for teachers were available, because unions vehemently resisted them.

System-wide evaluation policies came in two forms: external and internal assessments. External assessments were primarily the remit of the DEPP, who were responsible for organizing, piloting, and managing numerous system-wide studies. Compared to today, many of these evaluations lacked technological sophistication: as in Germany, few French researchers (within or outside state agencies) were expert in advanced comparative and statistical techniques such as psychometrics (Pons 2012, 216). Thus, the DEPP measured inputs and outputs at the system level (some sampled), and then the Ministry made somewhat arbitrary decisions about adjusting inputs, implementing new programs, or changing policy instruments when blunt targets were not met. Internal system assessments were developed during the 1980s during the move towards greater school autonomy. This involved structured self-evaluations by lycées, and the creation of ‘school projects’ and ‘school plans’. The different types of system-wide evaluation produced two major problems. One, they entailed profound contradictions within the quality assurance system as a whole, such as the centripetal effects of a national curricular ‘Common Core’ yet efforts at subsidiarity via school autonomy and flexibility. And two, the Ministry was increasingly dissatisfied with the type of information coming back from the quality assurance system. Existing system-wide evaluations, whether internal or external, only measured a few basic effectiveness indicators for French education, with few indicators of its efficiency. Measures of effectiveness can inform if targets (often arbitrary) are being met, yet the underlying relationship between inputs and outcomes must be assumed. Thus, independent of PISA testing, the desire for development of efficiency-oriented public policy instruments had come about in France during the 1990s and 2000s.
Quality assurance systems in France and Germany were similar in that they both adhered to a logic of state regulation. However, unlike the dearth of evaluation policy and the thin bureaucracies in Germany, the French system was highly sedimented, yet still unable to provide sophisticated evidence of processes. It is not perhaps surprising that government might have preferred a new logic of evaluation and system governance, if only they could find actors to help them design it.

4.2.5 Conclusions about Historical Background

By the mid-2000s, the cumulative effect of the political, policy and historical contexts resulted in policies that seemed susceptible to significant reform. Poor PISA results were a catalyst for this reform agenda, but so too were the election results of 2007, given the political structures that empowered the president to set an agenda knowing there would be few formal impediments to his policy choices. However, there were also a number of less visible factors which reinforced the policy and political status quo, among them a ‘statist’ and corporate-syndicalist political culture, and a sedimented quality assurance system rife with internal contradiction. In the next section, I examine the punctuation in the policy equilibrium between late 2007 and 2010, first assessing the policy design proposals that emanated from Minister Darcos in 2008, and then the actual policy program which eventually began implementation in 2010.

4.3 Patterns of Policy Change in France: Disorderly Punctuations and Obstructed Reform

Between 2007 and 2010, the government executive attempted to significantly change quality assurance, budgetary redistribution, and the structure of secondary schooling. Despite the formal capacity to make unilateral policy decisions, the government backtracked from its own policy designs once implementation appeared extremely unlikely. Initial reforms proposed by the Minister of Education in 2008 aligned with the ideological preferences of the new government, with the intention that the education system become more efficient and more accountable to external stakeholders. Poor PISA results were cited as justification for this change in instrumentation and orientation. Despite few
legislative obstacles to the reform program, the new government was unable to enact their preferences
due to resistance outside the conventional policy-making arena. A new Minister of Education eventually
settled for a circumscribed set of reforms that would increase pedagogical flexibility rather than attempt
to change school structures, redistribution, and quality assurance mechanisms. Despite the political will
and formal capacity to transform secondary schooling and the instrumental logic undergirding quality
assurance, policies remained largely the same in 2011 as in 2007.

4.3.1 Darcos Reforms (2008): ‘Lycée à la carte’

In December of 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy tasked his Education Minister, Xavier Darcos, with conceiving of a
sweeping reform plan following France’s poor results in the 2006 PISA assessment. During the next year
of policy development, Darcos proposed reforms intended to increase the efficiency of secondary
schooling by reducing costs, streamlining school structures and curricular requirements, and introducing
quasi-market instruments such as school contracts and increased student choice. Specifically, the Darcos
reforms called for: modularized timetables (i.e., semesters like the Finnish school system); a reduction of
the professional baccalauréat program from four years to three; reorganization of the curriculum with
fewer mandatory courses and fewer student-teacher contact hours; diverting resources from existing
teaching staff to an overhaul of the teacher training system (resulting in 13,500 job cuts on top of 11,200
retirees not being replaced); loosening of the rules regarding school catchment areas; and greater
school autonomy whereby schools would be empowered to pursue their own strategies with greater
financial autonomy vis-à-vis performance ‘contracts’ with the central Ministry of Education. It was
believed that these measures would make French schooling more effective for students in the highest
and lowest percentiles, by increasing the homogeneity of learning groups and better preparing teachers
for diversity in the classroom. The reforms would also make French schooling more efficient, not only
through austerity, but also by reducing the frequency of grade repetition, a factor believed to have an
especially negative impact on France’s PISA performance (Dobbins and Martens 2012, 35). Finally, these policies were to cultivate more accountability in the education sector, using contracts to steer outputs of more autonomous secondary schools, rather than continue to provide more resources as system inputs. The Minister still wanted to set the overall aims and orientation of the education system, yet the onus of responsibility for educational programming and performance would fall to administrators in the lycées and regional bureaucracy.

As aspects of the reform plan became public over the course of 2008, teachers’ unions mobilized allies and staged demonstrations during the fall school session. In October, the Federation of United Unions (FSU) organized the first protest demonstrations in Paris, also attended by leaders from the opposition Socialist Party (Martine Aubry, Jack Lang, Benoît Hamon, François Hollande and Bertrand Delanoë). Darcos’s official announcement of the Lycée à la carte bill in November of 2008 – sure to pass in the National Assembly due to an UMP majority – was met with even more vigorous street demonstrations and strikes. Teachers’ unions – the FSU especially – began to call for one-day strikes, which escalated in November and spread to cities across France. On 20 November, half of all primary school teachers went on strike, joined by about 20% of secondary school teachers and some university staff. The protests grew larger during December, organized by the FSU along with UNL and FIDL.

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175 Well before the Darcos reforms, education experts had reached the conclusion that grade repetition led to poor overall PISA scores (Duru-bellat and Suchaut 2005). However, there is little to suggest that experts espoused the policies proposed by Darcos as an appropriate means of reducing it.

176 Contracts were not a new idea for public sector governance, but they became increasingly prominent during the 1980s and 1990s with the advent of New Public Management in France and the UK. Contracts even had a pedigree in the education sector in France. With the 1958 Berthoin Law, contracts were established between the state and private (religious) schools, to ensure delivery of state-sanctioned curriculum. However, this was not a mode of governance because the contracts were not performance-related (i.e., they merely established clear expectations, and functioned according to a regulatory logic). Early in the Sarkozy administration in August 2007, the passing of Law 2007-1199 (the LRU Law) introduced a contractual logic to the governance of universities. University Presidential powers were expanded, especially in terms of recruitment and staff management, and the university’s budget could be supplied by private or external funds. Universities would sign four-year contracts with the state, which gave the universities full autonomy over budgeting and human resources, yet portions of their operating budget could be withheld if they could not meet pre-established performance targets. There was precedent for ‘contractualization’ of education.
main students’ unions), and accompanied by members of the newly formed political party, The Left [Parti de Gauche]. Labour unions got involved, although notably absent from the protests were the large trade union organizations, the CGT and CFDT, with some perceiving their absence as either complicity with the Sarkozy regime or fear of retribution on other labour issues (Lantier and Ravee 2008). On 15 December 2008, Darcos announced that the reading of the Lycée à la carte bill in the National Assembly would be postponed. Sarkozy claimed that he maintained support for Darcos’s policy design, yet informed his cabinet that perhaps his Minister needed more time to explain it to the public. Union leaders believed it was more likely that the President delayed progress of the bill fearing that the widespread demonstrations might turn violent, a pattern of escalation already seen in Greece (Anon 21 interview 2014). Rather than have the Lycée à la carte bill read in the spring sitting of the National Assembly, the legislation was shelved and eventually withdrawn altogether. Darcos was something of a lame duck Minister for the next six months, and on 23 June 2009, Sarkozy accepted the resignation of Darcos, and with that, the Lycée à la carte reform bill was officially dead.

4.3.2 Chatel Reforms (2010): ‘Lycée pour tous’

In June of 2009, Sarkozy shuffled his cabinet and appointed Luc Chatel Minister of Education. Chatel had the daunting task of seeing through the reform initiative started by Darcos, while also recognizing the discontent of teachers and students. In January, while Darcos was still Minister, Sarkozy had appointed Richard Descoings (then Director of Sciences Po) as a special advisor to Darcos for the redevelopment of a reform plan. Descoings conducted a public consultation process, convening a series of roundtables and town-halls in the spring of 2009, with representatives of parents, students, and teachers. He then submitted his recommendations on 2 June 2009 in a report entitled ‘Lycée pour tous’. Chatel used this

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177 On 6 December 2008, 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos was killed by police officers in Athens, and over subsequent weeks all the major cities in Greece were convulsed in large-scale demonstrations, some of which turned into riots. The memory of the 2005 riots in the banlieues of Paris was also fresh in the minds of French politicians, and Sarkozy especially, who was Minister of the Interior at the time.
report as the basic design for a reform initiative introduced in late 2009. The Chatel reforms no longer aimed to modify school structures or the procedure for obtaining a *baccalauréat*. Chatel retained the measures which supported weaker-performing students without compromising existing budgetary commitments, by increasing the pedagogical flexibility and autonomy of teachers within school-settings rather than increasing administrative accountability of school principals and rectorates. Teachers were given greater autonomy to control the pedagogical direction in their classrooms, and collaborate via a school-wide pedagogical council. Furthermore, entry-level requirements for the teaching profession were upgraded to the equivalent of a Masters degree (i.e., the ‘Masterization’ of teacher training).

There would be some attrition of teaching positions because retirees would not be replaced (in part due to the longer duration for pre-service teacher training), but resources remained consistent given the incremental adjustments made to contact hours and school schedules. Schools were also given more autonomy to implement pedagogical practices suitable for local contexts vis-à-vis the renewal of school-level ‘orientation projects’ [*projets d’orientation*] (MEN 2010). However, these were not intended as contracts related to central performance indicators. Instead, the objectives of the orientation projects were established within the school (by the school council), and could not be used to withhold funding or publicly rank schools. *Lycée pour tous* was passed by the National Assembly in 2010, with related Ministerial decrees beginning late 2010 and implementation throughout 2011 and 2012. While the Chatel reforms represented policy change – the ‘Masterization’ of teaching especially – this was much constrained compared to the initial Darcos proposals. *Lycée pour tous* focussed mainly on pedagogical flexibility and autonomy, rather than a new administrative logic of contractualization, or a re-orientation of school structures, procedures, or budgetary distribution.

4.3.3 Technical and Social Dimensions of Change: New Techniques but Traditional Logic

What is striking about the Chatel policies is the degree to which they focussed on pedagogical autonomy, rather than on new programs that changed the system’s structure and orientation, or on
policy instruments that changed modes of governance. Republican and egalitarian principles were maintained, with only small adjustments to ensure that schooling remained ‘progressive’ (i.e., more transparent and just, with more individualized support for students (MEN 2010)). Efforts to further decentralize and deconcentrate education were abandoned, with the elimination of proposals that would decentralize the baccalauréat procedure, abolish catchment areas [the carte scolaire], or give greater financial autonomy or pedagogical-oversight to school administrators. For quality assurance, attempts to shift from input to output control were curtailed, with a return to steering via resources and curriculum (albeit with some increased emphasis on competency models rather than knowledge acquisition).

The technical dimension of policy change amounted to greater pedagogical autonomy and flexibility. With the ‘Masterization’ of teaching, teachers would receive more training, and more autonomy within their classrooms (with collaborations among teachers encouraged). Students had greater choice of educational pathways during upper secondary schooling, and more personalized attention in order to select and maintain this course through to the baccalauréat. Although these new techniques assured more individualization, it was also a commitment to the status quo.

The social dimension of this policy change was the result of a failed attempt to empower an intermediary set of actors (school principals and regional administrators). Schools had greater autonomy, yet their orientation was determined not by school administrators and contracts but through a plan developed by the school council. Students had representation on this council, and the plan was connected to new formative assessments rather than to contracts or naming-and-shaming dynamics. Despite the increase in autonomy, the proliferation of information systems gave the impression of increased central state control – rather the reverse of a culture of accountability. Fundamentally, there was little change in the power of the dominant actors or in the regulatory logic of evaluation and governance.
4.3.4 The Punctuation in the Policy Equilibrium (2007-2010): A Disorderly Reform Episode

If the new managerialism has permeated French education, it was not due to formal policy changes early in the Sarkozy administration. Responding to the poor PISA results that had punctuated the education policy equilibrium, Sarkozy set an ambitious reform agenda. All things being equal, a conventional agenda-setting model should have pertained: after a critical juncture or trigger event, the President conveyed a negative image of the policy area in order to move policy-making out of its regular venue (the subsystem) and into a venue that was more ‘sympathetic’ to reform (in this case, the macro-political arena of cabinet meetings and legislative committees in the National Assembly). Hypothetically, these mechanisms would have led to different policy change outcomes than seen here, because the President had the power and the political will to transform the orientation and governance of French education. However, he was constrained in his attempts to change school structures, funding, or instrumental logics (from regulatory to contractualization). If there has been a significant change in French education, this has been a longer, slower process. Sharp attempts at reform seemed to actually reset the policy status quo somewhat, because the disruptive elements of the agenda were deliberately obstructed. PISA did become a kind of ‘grammar’ or ‘boundary object’ in the education discourse (Pons interview 2014; Norman interview 2014). Yet this discursive change came in spite of the Darcos reforms, not because of them, because the policies that emerged during this punctuation demonstrated more continuity with the past, than discontinuity.

4.4 Evidence of an Unstable Subsystem

The French subsystem differed from the German oligopoly because of variance across the three core properties of a subsystem, and thus I refer to it as an (unstable) policy monopoly. Note that I am not theorizing policy monopolies or unstable subsystems, but rather, using the term ‘monopoly’ to easily differentiate the independent variable. The French monopoly was structured by a small and exclusionary membership. Over the course of a disorderly reform episode, it further excluded pressure participants
who had previously dominated policy design. While monopoly actors need not agree on every element of an educational paradigm, they must share basic educational goals and interpretations of problems. This allows them to convey a coherent policy image, and garner a ‘monopoly of understanding’ over a policy area. Monopoly actors in France were unable to do this. When fundamental differences in policy aims and problem interpretations emerged, the subsystem was destabilized, leading to attempts by Darcos to restructure and re-stabilize via ‘exclusion’. However, a narrow consensus amongst a handful of actors produced an unsustainable environment for policy development, and ultimately failed to convince decision-makers that policy designs should (or would) be implemented. In this section, I discuss how the French policy monopoly changed in the years just prior to and during the punctuation in the policy equilibrium. I then examine the properties of the French policy monopoly, as well as the institutional and behavioural indicators that provide evidence of an unstable subsystem.

4.4.1 Evolution of the French Policy Subsystem

Between the early 1990s and 2008, the educational policy subsystem in France changed quite profoundly. Although the institutional categories of actors remained the same (government, state and pressure participants), the organizational identity of those actors, and their relative influence in the subsystem, underwent substantial change.

Pressure Participants: From a ‘Fortress of Teachers’ to a ‘Republic of Teachers’

Between the 1960s and the 1990s, there was a sea change in the role played by teacher’s unions in education policy-making. Through the 1970s and 1980s the leadership of the Federation for National Education (FEN) was a ‘fortress of teachers’, with remarkable agenda-management capacity and informal veto power. They successfully created a monopoly of understanding about education, which structured the French educational paradigm and largely ensured that ministerial officials would align
their policy aims to the interests of teachers. With the break up of the FEN in 1992, the Ministry no longer had a single negotiating partner or monolithic source of ‘implementation’ expertise. The more pluralistic ‘republic of teachers’ which followed was still monopolistic in their understanding of education issues and shared (abstract) aims. However, there were growing divisions among these pressure participants, which could be exploited. The union leadership still had subsystemic power, but they increasingly used this power to block one another’s preferences. There came a point when the only abstract aims which pressure participants fully agreed on was that equality was important, and that the system needed more resources. And the only policy means they agreed on was that (teacher) evaluation must not be high stakes, and administration must not impinge on pedagogical freedom. There came a time when union leadership preferred a sub-optimal status quo, to risking a loss in power or resources for their union. These dynamics began to destabilize the traditional policy monopoly even before Sarkozy came to power.

178 Occasionally, politicians tried to work outside this traditional policy monopoly, with limited success. Romuald Norman, a sociologist who has done extensive historical research on French education, claims that the 1975 Haby reforms (creating the comprehensive collège) did not emerge from French teachers, but rather, were inspired by a visit to British comprehensive schools in 1974 by new president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (Norman interview 2014). Still, comprehensives could only be implemented after extensive policy consultation with teachers’ unions. In the mid-1980s, Education Minister Chevènement tried on several occasions to work outside the consultative structures because they had grown too slow and cumbersome. He had some success because reasserted the ‘political’ (government actors) over the ‘bureaucratic’ (state actors), and tried to ‘empower’ teachers directly (bypassing the union leadership as pressure participants). He did this by emphasizing knowledge acquisition (not exploratory pedagogies), by instructing inspectors to evaluate the teaching of basic subject matter rather than the system as a whole, by appealing directly to the public, and by assuring teachers of a central (self-governing) role in the system (see Moon 1995).

179 Agnès van Zanten, a sociologist of education and member of the Superior Council for Programs, described the changing role of pressure participants: “The large teachers’ unions lost power, particularly amongst their own constituents, yet the leadership was organic. Their response to the loss of power has been to fragment into smaller and smaller unions and associations, each demanding a voice in policy-making and multiplying the number of pressure groups. The result is not necessarily a slowing down of the policy-making process, but rather, a weakening of change possibilities. The margins of what you can change in education policy is becoming smaller and smaller” (van Zanten interview 2014).

180 Distribution of (more) resources was always going to be contentious because of inter-union rivalry, but austerity was making distribution decisions increasingly unlikely anyway. Redistribution of (existing) resources also became a nonstarter once the union movement fragmented (assuming redistribution came in the form of formal policy – rendition was another matter). Regarding governance preferences, former General Inspector and representative to PISA, Alain Michel, had this to say: “Two of the main teachers’ unions, the SNES on the left and the SNALC on the right, have always resisted any kind of assessment of teachers except those conducted by the General Inspectorate
State Actors: The Changing Role of the DEP(P)

During the same period that teachers’ unions were fragmenting and beginning to destabilize the policy monopoly, the Department of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance (DEPP) within the Ministry of Education (MEN) became a reliable monopoly partner in the development of policies for quality assurance. The early days of the DEP(P) under director Claude Thélot were auspicious, and they garnered a reputation for scientific objectivity and technical competence, which would later translate into broad legitimacy.\(^{181}\) However, the administration of Education Minister Claude Allègre (1997-2000) was a difficult period for the DEP. They had to fight for survival, and priorities such as learning from domestic policy failure or international trends, or contributing to the design of evaluation policy, became secondary.\(^{182}\) It was during this period, in October 1997, that the OECD announced their plan to

\(^{181}\) Thélot was director of the DEPP’s predecessor (the DEP), from 1990 until 1997. He wanted the DEP to structure debates using statistics and evidence, and develop into a legitimate interface between political and social organizations that were engaged with education policy. In the French bureaucracy, all state agencies – particularly those tasked with quality assurance – must struggle against overt politicization. This was no less true for the DEP(P) during the early years: “The question was not any more one of opposing partisan or historical views, it was one of struggling for the scientific autonomy of the office so as to avoid the DEP(P) becoming an agency of communication for the minister” (Pons 2013, 63). Many agencies have the ambition to instill a culture of the ‘science of government’ (where knowledge is mobilized for policy learning), but many do not fully succeed, either in reality or external perception.

\(^{182}\) Allègre reorganized and subordinated the DEP to that of a mission (lower than a sub-department), and its evaluation activities were overseen by a council composed of scholars selected by the Minister and led by a regional school inspector. Jean-Claude Émin, who would later become Assistant Director of the DEPP, reflected on the relationship between the DEP(P) and the Minister: “When the DEP started in the 1980s, it had an important policy of publishing [its findings]. With some Ministers, however, this changed. This first occurred with Allègre. His idea of the DEP was not of assessment, but in fact, problematization. Allègre wanted the DEP to develop mechanisms that would allow him to look on his computer and be able to respond to a teacher on the other side of the country: ‘you say you have too much of such-and-such in your school? No, that is not true!’ This is a conception of assessment as a means to control the system, not long-term management or evolution. This was a difficult time for the DEP, a period in which they were instrumentalized. This happened again with Sarkozy, which began another period of instrumentalization of the DEPP, a time when unfavourable findings were not published, and so on. This was not necessarily an ideological thing – it was a certain idea about the link between research and policy decisions” (Émin interview 2014). Unhappy with Allègre’s leadership, Claude Thélot left in 1997. The newly appointed director asserted that the DEP would not be a quality assurance agency which provided direction for policy, but rather, “a clearing house for producing and disseminating statistical information and data” (Robert
construct an international comparative assessment, and put out a request for proposals of assessment instruments. The DEP tendered a bid to develop the assessment tools for France, but lost out to the Institute for Research in the Sociology and Economics of Education (IREDU) at the University of Bourgogne. Unsurprisingly, the DEP(P) became somewhat cynical about PISA. Between 2000 and 2006, the DEP(P) rebuilt and consolidated value (Pons 2013, 64). There were two factors that allowed the DEP(P) to resume its position in an evaluation policy monopoly: PISA and the Organic Law relative to Financial Regulation (LOLF). I deal with each in turn.

When the results of the first PISA assessment were released in December 2001, France had unexpectedly mediocre test results (with worse outcomes for disadvantaged socioeconomic groups). However, the prevailing political conditions prevented this news from ‘breaking out’ onto the macro-political agenda. Education Minister Jack Lang asked the DEP to interpret PISA findings for the media, and at a press conference in December 2001, the DEP shaped public perspective by criticizing PISA’s methodology – that it was flawed and unsuitable for assessing French education. Political scientist Xavier Pons (2012, 219) refers to this as the bias argumentaire of the initial PISA reception in France. It helped that this argumentaire harmonized the interests of all the powerful actors at that moment. For the DEP, they could consolidate authority and legitimacy by asserting their competence, justifying collaborative efforts with education researchers, and promoting their ‘in-house’ expertise. For other departments and actors within the MEN, they were reluctant to reveal their ignorance regarding technical issues surrounding PISA. For both major political parties, there was little appetite to put a

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intererview 2014). As they moved into ‘survival mode’, the DEP’s activities became less inclined towards policy learning or policy design, and more inclined to simply monitoring system-level inputs and outputs.

183 Departments responsible for education structure and programming had policies already in development (such as the ‘Common Core’), and therefore wanted to reassure the public that the education system was sound. Other actors in evaluation policy, such as the Inspectorate, had no expertise in psychometrics or large-scale assessment, and thus provided no comment. In fact, it would not be until April 2008 that the IGEN finally had a major conference devoted to international assessment (Pons 2012, 212). Researchers in civil society also had weak expertise in epistemological instruments, as they focused on curricular or pedagogical development.
political intervention on the agenda, because of the *cohabitation* government and the fractiousness of the Allègre years. Union leadership, who also had minimal understanding of PISA methods, were already biased against the ‘neo-liberal ideology’ of the OECD and not interested in implementing more testing regimes. Finally, the French media were either little interested (a mediocre ranking not being so newsworthy as Germany’s very poor ranking) or accepted the explanation by the DEP because of their weak understanding of the technical aspects. For the next three years, PISA was entirely an ‘insider affair’ (with the DEP as the experts), allowing issues of educational evaluation to stay within a policy monopoly involving the DEP(P). By the time the results of the 2003 PISA assessment were released in December 2004, the political conditions in France had begun to change, and both PISA and the DEP(P) had become more credible.

The other factor that cemented the DEP(P)’s role in the policy monopoly was the Organic Law relative to Financial Regulation (LOLF), which was passed by the National Assembly on 1 August 2001 and implemented in 2006. The purpose of LOLF was to build new budgeting procedures for the public sector based on transparent targets and specific indicators, with parliament able to award budget lines based on degrees of achievement. LOLF introduced relatively stable indicators for public service efficiency, measured annually, with a view to more transparent budgetary management and the involvement of fewer actors in the budgeting process. Moreover, LOLF had broad legitimacy across

184 For the ministerial *cabinet*, 2002 would be an election year. They wanted to downplay PISA results and minimize public reaction, as well as show support for teachers (predicted to be hostile to teacher assessments, and already on the defensive after three years of public criticism from Allègre). For governing parliamentarians, forcing President Chirac to act would likely reveal his weakness, whereas waiting until after the election in 2002 might give them actual influence over policy design if legislative committees were asked to review an education bill. For opposition deputies in the National Assembly, they had little capacity to set an agenda for reform anyway.

185 In January 2002, the DEP(P) presented PISA results at a meeting with the FSU. This presentation focused on cultural and methodological biases of PISA (Pons 2012, 217). Until 2008, the unions did not engage any further with PISA, instead absorbing the message that it was flawed. This reinforced union principles, as well as served their interests (i.e., the Inspectorate were trustworthy in a way that PISA results were not) (Mons and Pons 2009).

186 For example: the 2005 mid-term review of the EU’s Lisbon Strategy recommended benchmarking PISA indicators for their ‘open method of coordination’.

187 Political scientist Claire Dupuy referred to the LOLF as a first condition for the state to rebuild its infrastructural power: “the LOLF affected French education very much…. [it] was a knowledge instrument which became a kind of
political parties, and in both the executive and legislative branches of government: it emerged from a bipartisan agreement in the National Assembly, and experts and civil servants reported that government ministers started taking public policy instrumentation more seriously because of it (Norman interview 2014; Gauthier interview 2014). LOLF forced French education to move towards a better system of accountability, although not necessarily ‘contractualization’.

More importantly, LOLF changed the bureaucratic landscape. In 2006, as a direct result of LOLF, the administrative and technical departments within the MEN were re-organized. What emerged was a department for managing general and programmatic issues (DGESCO), and a department narrowly focused on system-wide evaluation and performance (the DEPP). The DEPP was charged with overseeing implementation of LOLF targets and indicators: “[The DEPP] received a new mission of performance analysis and was asked to rationalise its statistical production of indicators to better fuel the new budgetary documents” (Pons 2013, 64). By 2006, LOLF had made the DEPP central to the French policy monopoly, to the degree that evaluation of performance had become central to many policy areas.

**Government Actors: Personalities and Policy Entrepreneurship**

In France, government actors can have a profound effect on the evolution of subsystems, because elected government can both set a reform agenda and manage design aspects of it. Moreover, these

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LOLF’s objectives for education were compatible with the existing paradigm. LOLF made school autonomy (EPLE) and contracts (contrats d’objectifs) more important, but not to the degree that that contractualization became the logic of governance. Indeed, “implementation of a system of accountability was so bureaucratically-driven – so top down, with no feedback from practitioners going back up the other way – that teachers and administrators in the schools did not take it seriously” (Norman interview 2014). Perhaps this was due to the idiosyncrasies of education when compared to other public sectors, as a civil servant in the MEN observed: “in education, the culture of accountability and results takes on a particular meaning because the word ‘evaluation’ already existed, for assessing students, or for inspection of schools and teachers. So, what happened was the production of a kind of technical machine for aspects of management...[but] with less effect inside schools because principals represent the state but have no real power over teachers. They are there to administer schools, and are unable to change the practice of teachers” (Gauthier interview 2014).
actors change frequently, as a result of the brevity of electoral cycles. This is especially true in French education, where individual ministers rarely last more than two years.\(^{189}\) Therefore, the style of a Minister can have a strong effect on the stability and evolution of an education policy monopoly, as well as policy outcomes. The Minister is aware of how few opportunities there are to move ‘the immobile mammoth’ and thus they operate in particular ways to try to maximize effectiveness (for some this means representativeness, for others, efficiency). This style did not correspond to partisanship. For Socialist Minister Claude Allègre, the emphasis was on efficiency, yet the results were anything but efficient.\(^{190}\) For Conservative Luc Ferry (Education Minister from 2002 until 2004), the emphasis was on representativeness, and the result was the more inclusive ‘Thélot Commission’ which led to the Fillon law in 2005.\(^{191}\) The different policy outcomes and patterns of policy-making under Allègre and Ferry are

\(^{189}\)The Minister of Education is an important portfolio – clearly not as valued as the Ministry of Finance, Interior, or Foreign Affairs – yet still has some cachet. It is also perceived as something of a ‘poisoned chalice’ or occasionally even ‘the third rail’ of French politics. New ministers typically begin their mandate by announcing how they will ‘fix’ the education system, but are often unable to see reforms through because they leave their post so soon (typically within two years, as the result of elections or cabinet shuffles). It is a portfolio in which it is very difficult to succeed (in terms of effective policy outcomes), yet also desirable because it has a high national profile and considered a crucial testing ground for politicians with aspirations to other portfolios.

\(^{190}\)Allègre tried to design policy without much input from the subsystem, and usually managed to do little more than demoralize corporate and state actors with his frequent critiques of educational bureaucracy and the teaching profession. It was during the Allègre administration that union leadership began a public discourse criticizing neo-liberalism and creeping ‘managerialism’ in France’s public sector (Buisson-Fenet 2004). Arguably, this strategy was a reflection of anger over ministerial neglect of the policy monopoly. Yet a monopoly persisted, because many political appointees in Allègre’s administration remained sensitive to subsystem actors, such as Ségolène Royal, Deputy Minister of (Compulsory) Education. As a consultant for Royal, Marie Dulu-Bellat recalled that, “each time I suggested an idea for policy change, she would ask, ‘what will the SNES say?’ It was an obsession! And concerning pupils, any proposal to change the baccalaureate and the next question was, ‘what will happen in the streets?’” (Duru-Bellat interview 2014).

\(^{191}\)To begin his term, Ferry had the mandate to set a reform agenda: his UMP party had just defeated the incumbent Socialists in the legislative election (with Chirac re-elected president), and the backdrop was a recession and high youth unemployment. So, in 2003, Ferry triggered a ‘Debate on the future of the school’ \([\textit{Le débat national sur l’avenir de l’École}]\) and began an inquiry into ideal educational governance. However, he effectively outsourced the government role in policy design to a political appointee with much credibility amongst state and corporate actors – Claude Thélot. Thélot remained a prominent expert on education, and was director of the High Council for Educational Evaluation (HCEE) from 2001 to 2002. He headed a commission (colloquially known as the Thélot Commission) that consulted with experts and stakeholders and then submitted a final report to the Prime Minister on 12 October 2004. This report was the basis for the ‘Law for the orientation and programming for the future of schooling’ passed by the National Assembly on 23 April 2005, better known as the Fillon law (after Ferry’s successor as Minister of Education, François Fillon). A public servant in the DEPP has this to say about Thélot’s personal influence over subsequent legislation: “one should not underestimate [Thélot’s] role. He had a strong
a testament to the importance of personality and leadership style of government actors in the subsystem.

Government actors can also be more or less entrepreneurial with policy and the subsystem, depending on the resources or constraints presented by past policy. The Fillon law is a case in point. It was a major piece of legislation, yet did not fundamentally re-orient the aims or instruments of French education. However, it did provide contextual resources for later policy ‘bricoleurs’ to design a transformative reform agenda for the lycées and quality assurance. More importantly for subsystem evolution, however, the Fillon law replaced the High Council for Evaluation of Education (HCEE) with a High Council of Education (HCE), vacating space for quality assurance policy development, which was fully occupied by the DEPP. Although the Fillon law initially faced strident opposition from students, it did eventually become law and proceed with widespread implementation, creating ‘resources’ which government actors in the subsystem could later manipulate.

The point of this discussion about monopoly evolution is to demonstrate that subsystems can evolve over time, yet still be resilient and influential. This does not suggest that subsystems always matter. Indeed, as we know from the conventional agenda-setting model, there are punctuations in policy equilibria where subsystems have little influence and are quite suddenly transformed. Yet

personality, much intelligence and conviction. He was particularly adamant about diagnostic tools, and he informed the education world about their merits despite a general resistance to change” (Anon 17 interview 2014).

The Fillon law contained malleable concepts for increasing school autonomy. For one, it set a minor precedent in the localization of state power by permitting head teachers to impose non-compensatory ‘relief duty’ on teachers, forcing them to cover absent colleagues (although with very strict limits). More importantly, conventional regulatory mechanisms were reinforced (such as new national targets for graduation, dropout, and grade repetition), yet the law also re-interpreted ‘school plans’ to be a new kind of accountability mechanism with a more contractual aspect to it. Circulars stipulated that each school must develop a ‘contract of objectives’ [contrats d’objectifs] alongside their school plan, which defined the objectives that the institution must attain to comply with national guidelines, as well as indicators to assess achievement of targets. This was not really a true performance contract, but rather, it was intended as a ‘tool for dialogue’ between a school’s principal and the rector (or local academic authority). Yet the contract also functioned as the legal framework for implementation of the school plan, and based on it, the rector was permitted to facilitate or place conditions on a school before their plan went to the Board for approval. The seeds of ‘contractualization’ had been sown.
subsystems also seem to evolve in path dependent ways. I do not theorize institutional change here, but a discussion of their evolution is informative for understanding their influence and stability when policy equilibria are punctuated. Perhaps Germany developed a stable oligopoly because the KMK was its institutional blueprint, and because a dearth of quality assurance policies (nationally or sub-nationally) meant that subsystemic actors could cohere around means-oriented interpretations and policy images. Perhaps France persisted with a policy monopoly, despite incessant instability, because the MEN/FEN coalition was its institutional blueprint and the myth of the ‘indivisible Republic’ was its foundational paradigm. I cannot address these possibilities here, but I do briefly revisit them in the concluding chapter. In the next section, I move from the ‘roots’ of the French subsystem to its more visible ‘foliage’, and establish the existence and properties of an unstable policy monopoly when Sarkozy set the reform agenda in 2007.

4.4.2 Structure of the French Subsystem

In late 2007, when the education policy equilibrium was punctuated, there was no pre-designed policy response to poor PISA results. Nicolas Sarkozy asked his Education Minister, Xavier Darcos, to prepare a set of policies within the year. Darcos undoubtedly had his own policy preferences, but there was an existing subsystem to help design evaluation policies and he turned to them during the first half of 2008. This monopoly was comprised of: Darcos and his cabinet (and especially the Director, Philippe Court); the Department of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance (and especially the Director, Daniel Vitry); the major teachers’ unions (SNES-FSU and SE-UNSA); the Superior Council for Education (CSE); and Jean-Paul de Gaudemar as a special political appointee. Altogether, this bounded set of actors made up the implicit membership for a policy monopoly on educational evaluation. The structure of the monopoly restricted access to certain types of actors, in order to reach some consensus on how problems were defined and how (shared) objectives would be reached. It therefore excluded a large number of others, although actors in the monopoly could invite additional input or advice from outsiders to help them
formulate policy. There were three types of actors involved the monopoly: elected government, state experts, and a bounded set of ‘pressure participants.’ I describe each in turn.

Government actors need not acquire office via ballot to represent elected government in the subsystem. Indeed, all were political appointees. Minister Xavier Darcos was foremost amongst these, and he personally appointed his cabinet. As previous ministers had done, Darcos also made a special political appointment: Jean-Paul de Gaudemar, rector of the académie of Aix-Marseille. De Gaudemar managed and collated the design process, because the cabinet had other operational tasks to oversee. Because he was a rector – ostensibly an expert in the implementation of education policy – it gave the outward perception that de Gaudemar was a ‘policy user’ rather than a political appointee, but those within the monopoly regarded him as a government actor. All other members of government were excluded from the subsystem, yet some were afforded some consultative influence.

State actors were not included on the basis of ideology, except to say that they were expected to work in the national interest, as per their commitment to le service publique. As the only state actors in the evaluation policy monopoly, the DEPP were the exclusive experts on system performance, due to their technical role and new rules regarding institutional responsibilities (established by the LOLF). Moreover, DEPP Director Daniel Vitry seemed to concur with Darcos’s interpretation of problems.

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193 Inclusion of de Gaudemar was likely due to confidence and trust shown in an ideological fellow-traveller, but the fact that he was a rector could also be significant. The rectors functioned as a kind of meso-level feedback mechanism, collecting information about policy implementation from local teachers and administrators, and feeding it back towards the decision-makers in the central Ministry (Allouch interview 2014).

194 President Sarkozy was influential for design choices because the policy proposal would have to conform to his general vision of public policy. Other excluded government actors included the Prime Minister and ministerial cabinet, as well as the High Council for Education (HCE). Also outside the subsystem were personal advisors, such as the Montaigne Institute (a conservative think tank with some influence in the Sarkozy administration) or Darcos’s former colleagues at the OECD.

195 When the monopoly began to destabilize, Daniel Vitry received criticism for being complicit in the ministerial agenda. Beyond a general criticism of how statistical data produced by the DEPP was being used (and abused) by the Ministry, there was concern that Darcos stopped the DEPP from publishing their ‘briefing notes’ in the summer of 2008. For some, Vitry should have stood up to Darcos more, in order to preserve the scientific integrity of the DEPP (Dubois 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). Whether Vitry (or other DEPP officials) were entirely complicit with the final policy proposals is not clear, but the DEPP was certainly part of the institution that designed them.
State actors with a role in other educational subsystems were not included in this one, in spite of some overlap in competences. As the DEPP were considered experts on PISA and system-wide evaluation and performance, no other state actors were required in the monopoly.

The pressure participants were primarily the two major teachers’ unions, along with a policy-vetting role for the Superior Council for Education (CSE). Given the anticipated impact of the reforms on the lycées in particular, the union leadership in the monopoly represented secondary school teachers especially (namely, SNES-FSU and SE-UNSA). The National Union of Secondary Schoolteachers (SNES) was the more powerful and radical organization, although the moderate Teachers’ Union (SE-UNSA) also expected to be a part of the deliberations over policy design. As per traditional norms for significant reform, the leadership of the major unions expected special (sometimes even bilateral) consultation with the MEN. We shall see that during the design process in 2008, their involvement in the policy monopoly was in name only (and sometimes not even that). Less involved in the intricacies of design was the CSE. Before official submission of policy proposals to the high executive and the legislative branch of government, this Council had to be consulted. However, the CSE was not a reliable forum for teachers – the major unions especially – to influence design decisions. The major unions guarded their ‘right’ to be consulted independently, as key pressure participants in an evaluation policy monopoly.

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196 However, meaningful input was seldom sought, due to inter-departmental rivalries. Some were consulted (in a rather perfunctory manner) because they were responsible for programmatic aspects of education (such as DGESCO) or because policies would have implications for their jurisdictions (such as IGEN’s responsibility for school inspections). One expert observer of education politics suggested that every minister “must choose between the DEPP and the IGEN. This conflict has diminished over time – the DEPP is vital now – but still you see ministers favouring one or the other” (Buisson-Fenet interview 2014). There were also quasi-independent research agencies sanctioned (and partially funded) by the Ministry of Education, such as the INRP and IREDU. They analyzed various aspects of the education system, but their input was only sought by the DEPP on an ad hoc basis, due to the (qualitative, small-scale) nature of their findings.

197 The CSE represented many different stakeholder groups, including parents, regional government, school administrators, and more. As a collective, the CSE were hardly experts in implementation, so their role was to vet the policy proposal before it was ‘released’ to the macro-political arena. Of the 98 persons on this Council, only one third were teachers (and within this minority, each union only formed a plurality). Furthermore, amendments proposed in the CSE required a straight majority to carry, so even if teachers could agree with one another they still needed allies. Even then, what emerged were recommendations to the Minister, not prerogatives.
Aside of minority voices in the CSE, no other interest group, stakeholder, or corporate actor were involved in this subsystem.

The structure of the French monopoly is displayed in Figure 3 below, and institutional and behavioural indicators for the structure of the French subsystem are detailed in Appendix D.

4.4.3 Policy Images of the French Subsystem

The second defining property of a monopolistic subsystem is a shared understanding of a policy problem, so actors can cohere around a policy image. This need not mean agreement on core beliefs, nor even complete consensus regarding abstract policy aims or the ideal solution to a problem.
However, it would be an indication of a stable monopoly if subsystemic actors collaborated on policy design given a shared definition of an educational problem, and formulating solutions with a central role for themselves which permits the realization of benefits and/or burden-sharing. Because such a mutual understanding of issues did not emerge from the monopoly in France, a subset of monopoly actors eventually put forward a policy image which advocated greater efficiency and administrative flexibility in the education system.

Even before Sarkozy and Darcos were in power, there was an emerging policy image that Xavier Pons (2012) has referred to as an ‘ideal governance argumentaire’. This was a set of arguments framing the French school system as inefficient and ineffective, largely due to inflexibility in system management and pedagogical practice. This rigidity was especially manifest in comparatively high levels of grade repetition (and further indicated by uneven results on international assessments). This argumentaire suggested that French education was of very high quality, despite PISA findings. However, PISA also demonstrated fundamental weaknesses. Although PISA-testing did not establish causal relationships, the poor results were perceived as a symptom of deeper, inter-related problems: grade repetition and high dropout rates in the lycées; insufficient school autonomy; hidden inequality and selectivity; budget inefficiency; and poorly-targeted special assistance. Indeed, more than just a symptom of these underlying problems, PISA became a proxy or symbol for the rigidity and inefficiency of French education. The policy image that was emerging was defined by poor and declining PISA rankings, and the solution was framed in terms of better governance. Initially, however, the image of a governance problem (and its solutions) was assumed rather than discussed in the policy monopoly.

For government and state actors, the fundamental problem was school-level governance, and the solutions involved increasing institutional autonomy, improving the quality of teachers, improving evaluation mechanisms, and increasing stakeholder input (such as more parent and student choice). This entailed a new instrumental logic, because overcoming inherent system rigidity would require more
than simply mandating a reduction in grade repetition. Although pinpointing the source of these ideas is not essential to recognizing their manifestation in a policy image, they likely congealed from a number of sources. Much of the discourse seems to have filtered down ‘from the top’; from ideas circulating within the UMP party. However, ideas about evaluation and governance also appeared to have emerged from within the bureaucracy, including from the reformed DEPP, as the DEPP embraced its new role as performance evaluator (by this time advising on PISA implications rather than criticizing PISA methodology). By 2007, there were a number of actors who were mutually interested in policy discussions on efficiency, teacher training, performance-based evaluation (such as PISA testing) and performance-based governance (such as contracts or information-based instruments). These actors shared an understanding of the problems facing French education, and the subsystem congealed around a particular policy image centered on the ideal governance *argumentaire* and PISA evidence.198

Initially, pressure participants shared in the broad interpretation of what was ailing French education: rigidity; latent selectivity, poor use of budgetary resources, and insufficient school autonomy (for teachers, this meant *in* schools, not *of* schools). Working on the front lines, many teachers had long perceived these issues affecting their classrooms. The symptoms indicated a perennially mismanaged and under-resourced school system which had lost sight of its fundamental aims: to facilitate social equality, political integration, and critical thinking. Pressure participants perceived the issue as being a problem in system-level governance, and the solutions involved support for the street-level bureaucrats. While the unions were generally averse to changes in the status quo, they could support reforms that returned schooling to its core Republican mission, as well as promised to provide more resources for

198 Given some of the government and state members in this monopoly, it is perhaps not surprising that it produced a policy image based on the economics of education. The director of Darcos’s *cabinet* (and thus manager of consultation and deliberation processes), Philippe Court, was a graduate of the prestigious *École polytechnique* and worked previously in the Ministry of Finance. Jean-Paul de Gaudemar was also an alumnus of the *École polytechnique*, and went on to become an economics professor before his appointment as Director for School Education (DGESCO’s predecessor, DESCO). Finally, Daniel Vitry was trained as an economist prior to his appointment as director of the DEPP.
teaching (such as teacher training). It was not immediately clear was that each policy image depended on a different (implicit) vision of education, because the language sounded much the same (improving quality, ensuring equality, and so forth). But it eventually became obvious that Darcos’s vision was to make education more effective for the broader economy, increasing efficiency (and reducing costs), improving performance, and focussing on (vocational) skills and competences. The ideal governance argumentaire suggested that policy solutions should involve administrative flexibility and better pedagogical performance. Union leadership believed that solutions should involve pedagogical flexibility and better administrative performance. Initially though, the policy image was sufficiently vague that coherence – and subsystem cooperation on policy design – seemed possible.

In Appendix E, I detail the specific institutional and behavioural indicators for the ideal governance argumentaire, as the policy image which emerged from the policy monopoly. While ultimately not shared by pressure participants, this was the frame that guided policy development during the phase of the punctuation where agenda-management was still a possibility.

4.4.4 Instability of the French Subsystem

Stability is a key property for a subsystem to be influential and durable during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium. Despite a conventional (monopolistic) structure and the (seeming) shared interpretation of problems, the French subsystem was unstable during the punctuation in the policy equilibrium because it lacked mechanisms to depoliticize issues, allowing public posturing to replace private deliberation. Historically, conflict in French education had been largely contained to internal discussions between the state and particular corporate actors, such that the depoliticization of issues involved trying to find areas of basic agreement using arguments derived from shared principles and values. While any subsystem will attempt to depoliticize issues (and exclude participants) by narrowing some issues so as to appear technical, a stable subsystem will have clear institutional mechanisms for determining which issues are technical or political, as well as a forum for private deliberation for those
issues deemed political. When it emerged that the core members of a monopoly not only disagreed over the solutions to education issues, but fundamentally disagreed about the education system’s problems and purposes, the subsystem was neither flexible nor durable enough to manage conflict internally. Because of its monopolistic structure, it had effectively externalized dissent. The instability of the French subsystem was rooted in the erosion of the institutions and/or behavioural norms which managed conflict internally. In Appendix F, I review the institutional and behavioural indicators of subsystem stability, and provide evidence for where they were lacking.

4.4.5 Properties of a Policy Monopoly

Stability is an important property for a subsystem, because unstable monopolies struggle to manage the macro-political agenda and influence decisions and policy outputs. Unstable subsystems can influence the volatility of policy change dynamics without much affecting actual policy outputs. Yet stability is not a property that demonstrates the existence of a subsystem. That is demonstrated by structure and policy image. This section provided empirical evidence that there was an unstable policy subsystem for educational evaluation in France, demonstrable in the three subsystem properties: an exclusionary (monopolistic) structure, a shared policy image (at least initially), and disintegrating conflict management mechanisms. The erosion of institutional mechanisms and behavioural norms which depoliticize issues and stabilize subsystems made the French monopoly vulnerable during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium. Perhaps it was unwise for some of the monopoly actors to proceed with design of an omnibus reform, one that would impose budgetary austerity, restructure teacher-training, restructure the lycées, change the relationship between the central Ministry and local administrators and significantly change the logic of quality assurance. One should perhaps avoid engaging with an array of issues around which opponents can politicize issues, publicly argue over principles, and mobilize allies. Hence, the monopoly under Darcos could not manage the reform agenda nor control the venues for discussion of policy design. It is to these causal mechanisms that I turn in the next section.
4.5 Effects of an Unstable Policy Subsystem: Venue-shopping in lieu of Agenda Management

Having established the existence of an unstable policy subsystem, this section analyzes its effects on policy change during a punctuation in the equilibrium. One would normally associate the conditions of late 2007 with an agenda-setting model that leads to policy transformation: a new government with a reform mandate; poor results on a reputable international assessment (as a critical juncture); a Minister wishing to innovate; and a powerful executive with few formal impediments calling for significant change. The eventual policy outputs, however, were decidedly more reserved. Here I argue that the unstable subsystem made significant policy change unlikely, with evidence that instability encouraged subsystem actors to struggle over manipulation of the dominant policy image, and over the venues where policy would be discussed. Pressure participants who felt ignored during the design process were unable to shape the policy image emanating from the Ministry, so they engaged in ‘venue-shopping’: a politically risky strategy in which potential ‘losers’ challenged the monopoly by seeking an audience in another venue, thereby expanding conflict and mobilizing allies (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Schattschneider 1960). Ultimately, Sarkozy had a decision to make: either support the agenda that emerged from the unstable subsystem (thereby ‘forcefully’ transforming education policy), or acknowledge the rights of pressure participants to be more involved in policy development. In 2009, Sarkozy chose the latter, effectively blocking a significant change in instrumental logic. The outcome of these processes of framing and venue control were not entirely predictable, and in this case, the result was incremental adjustment that reinforced the policy status quo.

4.5.1 Framing as a Political Strategy

Even prior to the release of PISA results in December 2007, President Sarkozy signalled that education reforms would be forthcoming, with a public mandate presented to the Minister Darcos on 5 July 2007
This mandate framed the need for a more effective school system. Many of the goals and targets of the reform were much the same as before (reduction of failure and dropout rates; reduction of educational inequality; reduction of social segregation), with additional aims in terms of improving teaching conditions and making the teaching profession more attractive. Indicative of poor governance was the high rate of grade repetition and declining rank in international comparative assessments (before the release of PISA 2006 results). The ministerial mandate was not to direct the specific activities of the Ministry, but rather for the purposes of public consumption: it conveyed that the new government was aware of issues in the education system, and they would make a plan to fix them. The mandate suggested ways that the Minister could implement a reform agenda, consistent with Sarkozy’s electoral platform and his planned general review of public policy. These included relaxing the government’s regulatory role over catchment areas and school-level governance, empowering teachers vis-à-vis more training and/or performance pay, and establishing a broader and more systematic set of evaluation mechanisms. Despite the potentially transformative changes embedded in the mandate, Sarkozy’s ‘letter’ to his Minister suggested policies which were largely technocratic: French education was failing due to poor governance, so policy solutions would likewise involve seemingly bloodless changes to governance and assessment.

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199 It appeared as if Sarkozy had given direction to Darcos, because Sarkozy addressed his new Minister in a public ‘Mandate Letter’ on 5 July 2007, only days after forming his cabinet. However, Darcos also brought ideas to the Sarkozy administration, from his own experience. Darcos had been French Ambassador to the OECD, and in May 2006, he introduced aspects of the ideal governance argumentaire to the newly created UMP party that was supporting Sarkozy’s presidential bid. Apparently, Darcos argued especially for increased school autonomy, with contractualization a means to do this (Pons 2012, 221). Just before the elections in 2007, Darcos positioned himself simultaneously as ally to Sarkozy and defender of teachers’ true interests (if not the union leadership), by criticizing policy design under the incumbent Minister, Gilles de Robien (Cédelle 2009).

200 Concrete targets had been set back in 1989 and re-established with the Fillon Law, even though they were fast approaching successful achievement. The target of 100% of a given age group with at least a qualification from lower secondary (the CAP or BEP) had reached 92% by 2006, up from 80% in 1980. The target of 80% of a cohort achieving an upper secondary qualification (the baccalaureate) had reached the 70% mark by 2006, a remarkable increase from only 34% in 1980. Sarkozy did not disavow these objectives, instead framing his policies as a means to close the remaining gap using new instruments (such as improved teaching methods or better governance).
When an agenda for reform was set in late 2007, largely justified by a poor PISA ranking, many policy actors in education continued to have a poor understanding of international comparative assessments, and uncertainty over their implications for policy development. Xavier Darcos was familiar with PISA from his tenure as French Ambassador to the OECD, yet PISA provided no specific policy prescriptions and Darcos was no expert in psychometric assessment. To manage the reform agenda, Darcos relied on a monopolistic subsystem to develop policies for quality assurance and governance of the lycées. The subsystem linked poor PISA results to grade repetition, a conclusion supported by the High Council for Education (HCE).\footnote{The HCE pointed to studies done by its predecessor (the HCEE) and claimed that a high rate of grade repetition was a known issue as far back as 2003, which previous governments failed to remedy (Haut conseil de l’évaluation de l’école 2004; Forestier interview 2014).} The negative frame that emerged early in 2008 emphasized the connection between grade repetition and inefficiencies in governance and school structure, and initially made little mention of teaching quality. The solution called for better measurement and management – seemingly technical areas of education policy, for which the DEPP already had mechanisms in place (through LOLF and the Fillon law).

This frame, and PISA justification for it, came under scrutiny from the pressure participants who had been neglected in the monopoly. Union leadership soon realized that the proposed solutions involved a new logic for evaluation and school-level management, as well as a streamlining of lycée structures and release of teaching staff. This was stridently opposed by pressure participants in the subsystem, who felt ignored during the design process despite an outward appearance of consultation. While the DEPP was generally trusted, PISA remained largely unknown, so union leadership drew attention to the government’s changing position on the merits of PISA methodology.\footnote{The FSU even had a research unit that wanted to conduct independent secondary analyses of PISA data (Ascheiri interview 2014). However, the OECD only provides the raw PISA data to specific state actors, because the OECD is an intergovernmental organization, not a non-governmental organization (Anon 27 interview 2014).} Darcos’s frame gave the appearance of being evidence-based, but this was something of a façade. Indeed, international
comparisons were manipulated by all parties in France, because ordinal rankings oversimplified complex technical findings which were not well understood. Teachers’ unions politicized the agenda in the media, in an effort to demonstrate that the frame presented by the subsystem was a challenge to the fundamental principles and national aims of French education (their corporate interests notwithstanding). Pressure participants from the subsystem invoked arguments about national values versus the so-called neoliberal priorities of the OECD and the Sarkozy administration (Dobbins and Martens 2012; Mons and Pons 2009).

When teachers’ unions began to express deep concern about anticipated reforms, Xavier Darcos looked for other ways to reinforce an image of educational inefficiency, and control the policy image that was receiving negative publicity from pressure participants. Darcos ‘retaliated’ by suggesting uneven teaching quality was also a problem. In 2007, Darcos had positioned himself as a defender of the teaching profession. But by 2008, he was less sympathetic to the concerns of teachers, with members of his cabinet using the Pochard Report as a reference for the agenda on reforming the lycées (Darcos 2008a). In 2007, the Sarkozy government had established a commission on the state of the teaching profession, headed by Marcel Pochard. Union leadership was initially supportive of an official inquiry which would reveal problems that teachers were facing. However, once the Pochard Report was published in February 2008 and used to frame the teaching profession negatively, union leadership turned against it. Among teachers’ unions, only the SGEN-CFDT (and their counterpart for private

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203 In the summer of 2007, shortly after his appointment as Minister, Darcos had positioned himself as a defender of teachers by claiming he had limited the number of job cuts in 2008 to 11,200. The FSU were grateful that he ‘limited the damage’. However, poorer-than-expected electoral outcomes for the UMP party in the municipal elections of March 2008 caused the national executive to re-appeal to their base (including upper middle class parents) and take a harder line with teachers’ unions (Cédelle 2009). Even if the Pochard Report was provocative to the unions, the subsystem persisted in their use of it to frame the policy area (and future deliberations).

204 The Pochard Report was not intended as a criticism of the teaching profession. Initially, it expressed concern about the stagnation of teacher salaries (especially for early career teachers), and made recommendations on how to revitalize the profession as a whole. The Report recommended: restructuring of mandated contact time (from weekly hours to annualization); co-teaching across subjects (facilitating collaborative teaching but also allowing teaching outside specialized subject areas); a limited capacity for schools to modify curriculum for local context; some form of merit recognition by school administration; and having administrators sign a contract with each
school teachers, the FEP-CFDT) praised the report as necessary for the evolution of the profession and the success of students. Others criticized it as a reconstruction of public education governance along the lines of the private system.²⁰⁵ A war of words between the government and unions began to spill out of the trade press into popular media, setting the stage for more public battles to come.²⁰⁶

4.5.2 Framing as a Causal Mechanism

When 2008 began, the monopoly overseeing the development of reforms had yet to deliberate over the details of policy. Through the first half of the year, actors in the subsystem struggled over how to frame education problems and solutions, as these issues had not yet entered the more macro-political spheres of Parliament, the press, or the public psyche. Within the Ministry, the PISA frame was not much opposed by actors outside the design monopoly. Few state actors questioned the expertise of the DEPP, or their (new) interpretations of the quality and utility of PISA findings. The DEPP were the institutionalized experts on assessment and system-wide evaluation, and their position on international comparative assessments had evolved since 2001. Jean-Claude Émin, deputy director of the DEPP during this period, commented on the reception to PISA by different actors:

“The Inspectorate was not much interested in PISA until later. Universities did not have the capacity or tools to do research on system-wide assessment, and they could only work on very small sample sizes. The DEPP had the tools, providing proper sampling and even manipulating the data [consumed by others]. It was often said that during this period, the DEPP – and not academics – had a sort of leading management on educational research in general. I think this was

²⁰⁵ UNSA Education remarked that the recommended reforms could lead to the ‘liquidation of the civil service’. SNES-FSU called the Pochard report a ‘real provocation’ and on 8 February 2008, signed a joint declaration alongside the conservative unions (SNALC and SNCL) which warned that the report ‘cannot serve as the basis of negotiation’ (Guimont 2008; Jarraud 2009).
²⁰⁶ In March 2008, Darcos did an interview in which he observed that French schooling was not effective, that one of the highest teacher/student ratios in the world did not correlate to positive rankings in international assessment, and that teachers were out of touch with a nation that was struggling (de Charette 2008). SNES-FSU responded in April 2008 by commissioning a survey of teachers’ reactions to the Pochard Report, and released the negative results on the eve of a scheduled meeting with Darcos (16 April 2008). Daniel Robien, co-secretary general of SNES-FSU, spoke of ‘uncontrollable feelings of anger’ among secondary teachers, and how a discussion of lycée reform was not possible until reform of the teaching profession – including concrete numbers of job cuts – had been determined (Jarraud 2009).
true. I should note that this meant the DEPP, and not the Ministry as a whole” (Émin interview 2014).

Although causal relationships could not be inferred from PISA data, the Director of the DEPP did not contest the frame that was being put forward by the monopoly. The frame put the onus of management and implementation of new evaluation policies on the DEPP, the experts in quality assurance. This re-assured executive decision-makers that the reforms would be well-managed.

However, not all member of the subsystem had contributed to this framing of education issues. As government actors and pressure participants became increasingly intransigent about the solutions, Darcos ignored union leaders unless they accepted his interpretation of the problems, and agreed to his special negotiation protocols. Teachers’ unions were generally status quo oriented, yet in private deliberations the leadership could be more progressive than the base, if only because they understood policy-making from the demand side. Now, however, the pressure participants had become staunch defenders of the narrower interests of their base (and the status quo as well), even when discussing policy in relatively private settings (Buisson-Fenet interview 2014). The conflicting frames made it necessary for a choice to be made in the macro-political arena: accept the policy image as presented by Darcos and impose reform on teachers, or reject it and the authority of the subsystem. The fact that this choice was necessary meant that the unstable subsystem had failed to manage the reform agenda.

4.5.3 Venue Control: Venue-shopping as Political Strategy

Venue-shopping is a risky political strategy, because actors can never be certain how their issues will be received in a new venue. In this section, I discuss the venue control strategies used by Minister Darcos

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207 An executive at SE-UNSA recalled: “The reforms that began in 2002 [eventually the Fillon law] involved teachers proposing and designing programs. With Darcos, we were not even aware who was designing the programs, many of which just emerged from his cabinet, presumably designed by political appointees without experience in education. They didn’t know the slightest thing about how children actually learn! The consultation with teachers lasted only a few weeks, and teachers were not given any opportunity to really look at the reforms, understand them, and give their opinion. It was not until we got into the CSE that we could really look at the reforms, line by line” (Anon 20 interview 2014).
to stabilize the subsystem, and then the venue-shopping tactics of pressure participants.

Early in 2008, at the very beginning of the policy development process, Minister Darcos established a negotiation protocol to structure discussions with teachers’ unions. In effect, the government actors in the subsystem wanted to control the venues for policy discussion. The protocol outlined certain basic (and presumed shared) assumptions, as well as principles for the deliberation process. This was unprecedented, yet Darcos still demanded that union leadership sign the special protocol before he would discuss policy with them. Most union leaders refused to sign until after it became clear that they were being ignored and losing what little leverage they had (Anon 21 interview 2014). By the time the leadership from the larger unions (SNES-FSU and SE-UNSA) had capitulated and signed the protocol, it was already late in the policy development process. With the design of reforms essentially complete, Darcos simply used the acquiescence of the unions as a way to claim credit for effective leadership, as well as legitimize his policy proposal. Therefore, the Minister could claim that a broad number of actors had consulted or deliberated in policy development, but in practice, actual design had been delimited to a narrow group within the monopoly.

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208 These protocols emerged from a draft bill demanded by Sarkozy early in 2008, regarding the right to strike and the provision of necessary services (to be modeled after a similar bill for the transport sector). On 24 January 2008, Darcos said he would begin negotiating with unions to find an agreement over minimum necessary services. When no discussions were held for three months, Sarkozy demanded a bill before the summer. On 26 May 2008, Darcos presented the unions a draft bill which would establish new rules regarding strikes. It proposed that individual teachers would have to report strike intentions to an administrator 48 hours in advance; students could still go to school facilities to be watched by staff and administrators; and union leadership must ‘pre-negotiate’ a strike and only after issuing a ‘social warning’ of eight days. This last aspect obliged participation in talks, fixed the number of negotiators, and required leaders to sign off on a list of points of agreement and disagreement (AFP 2008; Cédelle 2009). It was intended to curb the practice of union leadership agreeing to policies in private negotiations, then convincing the rank-and-file membership to reject already negotiated policies (especially prevalent with the SNES-FSU and the more radical unions). Yet it also became the basis of a general negotiation protocol between the Ministry and the unions, in which the Ministry could effectively set the agenda (and frame problems) prior to all policy discussions, with the union leadership made aware that they must eventually sign off on progress towards those issues. Despite denunciation by every union, the bill passed muster with the Constitutional Court in July, and was made into law on 21 August 2008.

209 As a leader of SE-UNSA reported: “SE-UNSA initially refused to sign the protocol, but when we discovered other unions had signed, we found ourselves locked out of the consultation process and could not defend the interests of our members. Ultimately, we had to sign, and even then, our Secretary-General had to plead with Darcos to sign because initially we had refused. It was humiliating” (Anon 20 interview 2014).
Teachers’ unions, accustomed to consultation during the development of education policy, realized they had been ignored by government and state actors in the subsystem, so they shifted the debate to ‘the street’ to challenge the policy frame and draw public attention to their issues. It was not enough to challenge the policy proposals in the popular press, in the National Assembly, or in the Superior Council for Education (CSE), because these arenas alone were unable or unlikely to block the reforms. Strikes and street demonstrations were important for teachers’ unions, in order to visibly mobilize allies and create the appearance of widespread resistance. The hope was that this might influence conventional policy-making venues and compel one of them to become a meaningful veto point. Perhaps only in France is ‘the street’ a viable venue for policy debate. In other places, demonstrations were employed by social movements to draw attention to issues, while strikes were used by unions to achieve better work conditions. In France, these tactics were fruitfully combined to not only protest social policies, but to also try to amend, block or overturn them. For union leadership however, there remained a significant risk in the venue-shopping strategy if the wider public did not sympathize with teachers. Failure meant losing influence over the reform agenda. It could also lead to exclusion from policy design processes in the future. The key was to convey solidarity, giving the impression that large sections of society were represented, in order to compel decision-makers to exit conventional policy-making venues and negotiate ‘in the street’.

For the Lycée à la carte reforms, the initial attempt to shift venues was made in April of 2008. To the surprise of many, Minister Darcos announced that reforms would be completed in time for the 2009 school year (meaning that policies must be implemented by September 2009, and thus legislated within

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210 Gérard Aschieri, former head of the FSU, explained why teachers’ unions believed the risks worthwhile: “The feeling amongst teachers is that striking is always an option. Indeed, in France, it is easier for teachers to strike than other categories of professionals. Strikes are something of a tradition in France…yet amongst public sector workers in France, teachers are a more elevated and respected profession, perhaps more so than the police or prison guards! This constitutes a real force and presence in public debates, but also in policy discussions” (Aschieri interview 2014)
the year). This would include at least 13,500 job cuts. This spurred a number of smaller demonstrations by SNES-FSU, supported by more radical students (Cédelle 2009). During the summer holidays, Darcos had time to consolidate. While the Lycée à la carte bill was not quite ready for the National Assembly, major planks of the reform were introduced on 28 August 2008. In a press conference, Darcos claimed that school principals and teachers’ unions had already agreed to the general reform agenda, and only details had to be worked out (Darcos 2008b). Smaller demonstrations ensued, until eventually, on 9 October 2008, SNES-FSU walked out of talks with Jean-Paul de Gaudemar. The SNES leadership argued that the proposals were patently unfair to students (and incidentally, to teachers as well).211 A week later, Darcos presented the proposed Lycée à la carte bill to the CSE, and shortly after the large-scale strikes and demonstrations began. FSU rallied many teachers’ unions to participate in strikes and street demonstrations, many of which were also attended by labour leaders from trade unions, opposition politicians and intellectuals. However, the group that was most critical for success were lycée students.212 Once the students were mobilized en masse, the FSU were more certain that their strategy would be successful, and that consultation in legislative committees or the CSE would no longer be the only remaining venues for policy debate, or to exercise informal veto power.

4.5.4 Venue Control: Venue-shopping as Causal Mechanism

The politicization of education issues put the policy debate onto the macro-political agenda, and eventually shifted to venues where the concerns of corporate actors could again influence policy design. By escalating the conflict to a kind of ‘street brawl’, pressure participants compelled the monopoly to bring the discussion out of the ‘rue de Grenelle’ (the Ministry), and onto the ‘rue’. The immediate

211 They argued that the reduction of staff and teaching hours, combined with additional special lessons, would create too great a burden on teachers, because their students needed more attention, not less. What is more, these policies contradicted the French ideal of equal education opportunities – in this context, this meant equal attention for all pupils (Cody 2009).

212 Student opponents argued that the government was making unilateral decisions without considering the input of students (Allez Enfants: Französische Schüler bremsen Sarkozy 2008).
outcome arising from this venue-shopping tactic was the postponement – and ultimately the withdrawal – of the Lycée à la carte reforms. After the death of a 15-year-old student, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, during a demonstration in Athens on 6 December 2008, the Élysée began to fear that escalating street demonstrations might result in the injury or death of a French lycée student. On 15 December 2008, Sarkozy indefinitely postponed the reform program, and it also became clear that Darcos would “appear in the role of sacrificed soldier” (Cédelle 2009). Darcos remained as Minister of Education until June 2009, but was largely reduced to an observer during a new consultation process led by Richard Descoings (special appointee of Sarkozy’s, in January of 2009). The outcome was not only the obstruction of the policy proposals, and development of more modest reforms, but also to affirm the legitimacy and authority of corporate participation in policy design. However, the venue-shopping tactic had unintended consequences for the traditional pressure participants. In the new policy design procedure that followed, Richard Descoings consulted with many end-users of education policy, not just the leadership of the two major unions.

Between February and April 2009, Richard Descoings visited 80 lycées in 76 different départements, and met with parents, students and teachers’ groups. Sarkozy and Darcos made occasional public appearances at these policy roundtables, to demonstrate that they were taking the consultations seriously. 213 On 2 June 2009, Descoings submitted his public report to Sarkozy, entitled ‘Lycée pour tous’. It suggested that the Lycée à la carte reforms went too far, but also that a full reversion to the existing status quo was no longer viable. From his consultations with stakeholders, Descoings proposed a more conservative design for education policy, including a recalibration – but not radical reform – of the baccalauréat. 214 Descoings would go on to make several recommendations

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213 The consultations were also available to the public via Youtube, at: https://www.youtube.com/user/lyceepourtous/videos
214 Other ‘programmatic’ recommendations included improving how students were ‘oriented’ for career choices, a greater focus on technology, and an emphasis on modern languages and their oral component (Descoings 2009). Furthermore, the report advocated for a reduction of the number of pupils per class, but also to separate this issue
regarding evaluation policy and modes of governance for quality assurance. Sarkozy agreed with the findings and publicly committed to implementing the more modest reform agenda. A week later, following European Parliamentary elections, Sarkozy shook up his cabinet and replaced Darcos with Luc Chatel, who was then charged with seeing through the Lycée pour tous policy agenda.215

In the end, the form and degree of policy change was determined by Nicolas Sarkozy, and thus was somewhat unpredictable. He could have opted to force through policies that would transform education, but doing so risked prolonging a highly politicized battle with teachers’ unions, including more street demonstrations and the likelihood of poor policy implementation. Sarkozy opted instead to obstruct Darcos’s reforms, and initiate a new policy design process led by Descoings. The outcome was Lycée pour tous, a more modest form of policy change. The venues for policy design also changed as a result of union activities, Descoing’s policy suggestions, and Chatel’s acquiescence.216 The teachers’ unions had renewed their legitimacy, but no longer exercised influence through exclusive bilateral consultations. With the subsystem effectively inert, pressure participants relied more on the Superior from teachers’ schedules to show that contact hours were not being reduced in order to eliminate posts (Réformes du lycée: Descoings a rendu sa copie VIDÉO 2009).

215 The policy preferences of the Sarkozy administration did not change because reforms were obstructed, and Luc Chatel would continue to look for ways to change evaluation policy. In November of 2011, Chatel drafted a decree on teacher evaluation that would see mandatory three-year intervals between inspections, and principals replace inspectors in all aspects of evaluation (giving them power over teachers’ career advancement). Teachers’ unions again mobilized strikes during December and January, and rejected a second reform proposal - almost identical to the first one – in March 2012. Nevertheless, the Minister maintained the proposal, and it was even published as an official decree on 8 May 2012, only two days after the Socialist François Hollande had defeated the incumbent government (but before the official swearing in)! In the end, this would only succeed in further poisoning a declining relationship between teachers and school principals, as the Hollande administration would overturn it, as well as design other policies highly favourable to union interests (Battaglia 2012; Collas 2012; Le Monde 2011).

216 Descoings told the press that there must be “a negotiation with teachers' unions on the nature of their mission and accounting of their service: some will have to be compensated in the long term by the reduction of the number of hours/pupils” (Réforme du lycée: “Ne rien faire serait explosif” 2009). As for evaluation and governance, Descoings suggested involving teachers and inspectors in the creation of transparent evaluation mechanisms, as well as giving school principals real budgetary autonomy for infrastructure spending but not in the form of performance-related contracts (Descoings 2009). Finally, Descoings said that teachers must be trusted, and he admonished the government and state for their heavy-handed policy-making process: “The Ministry of National Education must also ‘change its feathers’. To think of itself as serving its staff and students, rather than as the a simple dispenser of orders to be executed” (Descoings 2009, 59).
Council of Education (CSE). The CSE remained consultative, yet became a place taken seriously by the government. Teachers’ unions could actually influence policy design and informally veto design choices, but only if they could rally sufficient support from other stakeholders. SNES-FSU were still not pleased with aspects of the Lycée pour tous reforms, but as one of their executive noted,

“with the Sarkozy government, the social dialogue never worked well. The Superior Council of Education was put in charge of examining and discussing education policy; the reforms and programs...This council was only advisory and the government could ignore it, but we did get some changes to the reforms, all the same” (Anon 22 interview 2014).

Even their union rivals noted that the maintenance of the baccalauréat structure was largely due to SNES pressure (Anon 21 interview 2014). However, the SNES leadership had now become a minority voice. The more moderate SE-UNSA were now finding allies in parents and students: “it was after Darcos resigned that [SE-UNSA] began to build a coalition in the CSE to support [the Chatel reforms]” (Ibid.).217 ‘Shopping’ their policy image in new venues allowed the major teachers’ unions to not only obstruct the reform agenda, but also allowed them to shift the venues where policy design would be discussed. Unfortunately, this also meant that they forfeited their privileged position as pressure participants in an exclusionary subsystem.

4.6 Alternative Explanations for the French case

An agenda-management model argues that a change in instrumentation during punctuations in policy equilibria must be understood in relation to sectoral policy design institutions. While ideas and partisan interests were important factors for the resilience of the policy status quo in France, the capacity to mobilize resources (as information, access or allies) was determined by the policy subsystem. Decision-

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217 By managing to obstruct the reform agenda regarding changes to school structure, this SNES ‘victory’ somewhat undermined their capacity to mobilize against Lycée pour tous. “The SNES were unable to mobilize the students against the [Chatel] reform, to have them go into the street, because the UNL position was very close to the [National Federation of Councils for Students’ Parents (FCPE) who supported the new agenda]. UNSA [Education] and the FCPE were in agreement that this reform was good” (Anon 20 interview 2014). The primary concern of the students had been satisfied, so the SNES leadership knew that they would struggle to mobilize students to re-join new demonstrations.
makers in macro-political institutions were certainly influenced by international ideas and the electoral concerns of their political party. However, during key moments where high-level decision-makers made choices about the appropriateness of policy design, they considered this choice in light of the structures and stability of policy deliberation. I argue that in comparison to ideational and partisan alternatives, the agenda-management model offers a superior account of the obstructed reforms in France.

4.6.1 International Policy Transfer and an Advocacy Coalition Framework

For obstructed reforms to be explained by ideas and policy learning, one anticipates that reform efforts were driven by internationally-informed research and expert knowledge, and the curtailing of reform was due to weaknesses in the domestic reform advocacy coalition. For this model to be compelling, then education ideas would not be used as mere cover for ideological commitments, nor would cognitive theories about education be jettisoned due to a pragmatic calculus about successful implementation.

For an international diffusion of ideas to be the primary cause for the type of change (and policy resilience) seen in France, then ideas and cognitive beliefs would drive reform attempts. Coalitions would coalesce around opposing theories and evidence rather than pre-existing ideological, normative or symbolic arguments.

*International Policy Transfer*

The ‘internationalization of education policy’ literature has suggested that France’s poor ranking in PISA 2006 spurred the French government to try to implement reforms ‘à la finlandaise’ (Finland being the model of best practice according to PISA) (Dobbins and Martens 2012). There is ample evidence suggesting that French governments paid attention to the work of international organizations. Unlike the somewhat caustic relationship between PISA Director Andreas Schleicher and the governments of his home country, there was a positive working relationship between the OECD’s Deputy Director for Education, Bernard Hugonnier, and Xavier Darcos, who had previously been French Ambassador to the OECD (Hugonnier interview 2014). Therefore, Darcos himself was likely the largest ‘transmission belt’ for
OECD ideas about education. The question is, did French decision-makers in the high executive really learn from international sources, and implement these ideas in actual policy choices? For one, there was less of a gap between PISA ideas and the French system (especially when compared to Germany) suggesting that ideational diffusion would be a smoother process. However, many politicians and civil servants seemed incapable of absorbing lessons or evidence which did not reinforce their existing beliefs. Where there was ideational conflict, such as with ‘foreign’ measurement tools or techniques, international models were seldom considered – and often maligned – by French officials. ‘State learning’ occurred, yet perhaps not quite in the way suggested by models where expert knowledge or new theories of education changed the minds of actors in the high executive. Indeed, PISA 2006 was never published as a full report in France (Pons 2012, 217). Observers of education reforms in France have called PISA a ‘boundary object’, a ‘communication tool’, a ‘grammar for policy’, and even a ‘caricature’ – but seldom a learning tool for politicians (Norman interview 2014; Pons interview 2014). Evidence suggests that Xavier Darcos ‘parachuted in’ pre-conceived proposals during the policy development process, and international models were used to justify reforms rather than consciously absorbed by executive decision-makers.

218 A number of important structural and orientational features of the French education system were already aligned to current best practice as defined by PISA (such as comprehensive schooling and highly-accessible early childhood education).

219 Romuald Norman elaborated: “it is important to understand the distinction on ‘Rue de Grenelle’ [the location of the headquarters for the National Ministry of Education]. Number ‘105’ is where the cabinet is located. They represent the ‘politics of education, and in a way, are the ideological dreamers! The ‘107’ [an adjacent entrance to the same building] is the ‘techno-structure’ of education. These are the bureaucrats that [design] policies. If there is any learning, it happens in 107. They seldom realize how much they learn or borrow from outside, because they are so embedded in their networks that it does not occur to them where policy ideas originate from. Yet they do borrow techniques and instruments, and follow recommendations. The DEPP provides a good example for this. Jean-Claude Émin developed many of the indicators which were supposed to measure the selectivity of schools (graduation rates, grade repetition rates, and so on). It was purported that these indicators were developed to combat the consumerism of parents [wanting school rankings publicized] and market forces in education. Yet when you look at these indicators, they perfectly align with a logic of accountability! And they came out of [the OECD’s ‘Indicators of Education Systems’ project]! Although they were presented as a measure that would promote equality, they are in fact measures which pertain to economics and theories of human capital. Indeed, the work of the DEPP has been a strange compromise between equality and human capital theory. It is difficult to know if this was strategic on the part of the DEPP – or if it was even conscious!” (Norman interview 2014)
Domestic Advocacy Coalition

Although it is difficult to know with any certainty what individuals believe, the Advocacy Coalition Framework argues that beliefs or theories are communicated across a subsystem of ‘sense-makers’ until veto players are convinced by one set of policy beliefs. Arguably, then, incremental policy change occurred because reform advocates were unable to persuade other subsystem actors of their ideas, and policy proposals were informally vetoed in the subsystem before they had a chance to be formally vetoed in macro-political institutions. However, evidence suggests that informal veto players (such as teachers’ unions) were not really given opportunity to join a reform advocacy coalition. Many other actors with claims of legitimacy or expertise (such as researchers, journalists or policy users) were not involved in the policy subsystem at all. The very meaning of subsystem, according to an Advocacy Coalition Framework, would need reconsideration: the French subsystem did not appear to have two (or more) distinct belief coalitions, each side channeling resources from myriad public and private actors, and a policy broker to adjudicate claims or bridge differences (Sabatier and Weible 2007). If this kind of activity occurred at all, it was outside the subsystem and in the macro-political arena, and the intent seemed less about convincing the other side (i.e., policy learning) and more about marshaling public support (i.e. politicking). Even civil servants within the DEPP (ostensibly within the reform advocacy coalition) resented the way that Darcos was ‘weaponizing’ PISA to achieve preconceived goals for economic efficiency:

“when PISA showed that grade repetition in France was producing negative results, [the DEPP] had already been saying this for thirty years. We even have reports from the early 1980s that showed why repeating a year wasn’t efficient, showing that students who repeated a year didn’t have the same acquired knowledge as those who did, and that those who didn’t repeat a year were doing better. In 2005, the DEPP also wrote an important report on grade repetition, based on CEDRE evaluations of 2003. But then in 2007, with the results of PISA 2006, Darcos said we have to deal with it because the OECD said so. His essential objective was to lower the cost of education more so than to improve the results of students” (Anon 17 interview 2014).

Many began to mistrust the administration’s motives and resented the closed-door process of problem-solving, more than they questioned the logic of the policy choices. Undoubtedly, (international) ideas
were important because they helped to define problems and suggest solutions, yet the fact that there was so much resistance to the institutionalized process of problem-solving suggests different dynamics. Even more important than reform ideas were the structure and stability of sectoral institutions, because subsystems filtered ideas into policy images that could be useful for decision-makers.

4.6.2 Partisan Politics and Competition in Macro-Political Arenas

There is much evidence that suggests that partisan politics played a significant role in the obstruction of reforms in France. Part of the analysis in this chapter focussed on how policy preferences were developed within the machinery of party organization, and how these reform proposals were challenged by ideological (more so than ideational) adversaries in the macro-political arena. However, given that low-grade politicization was something of a constant for French educational policy-making, why were policy changes obstructed in 2008 and not 1975, 1989, 2005, or 2015? The key evidence which demonstrates that partisanship was not the key determinant for policy change was that the Sarkozy administration had formal power as well as favourable electoral timing to realize partisan objectives, yet did not. Ultimately, the instability and questionable legitimacy of the policy subsystem compelled Sarkozy to make a choice: impose reforms on policy users, or compromise on the form of policy change. Although the eventual outcome cannot be predicted by either a partisan politics or an agenda-management model, the latter has more credibility.

Partisan Policy Development Institutions.

The degree and length of time of education politicization in France ensured that political parties were continually developing clear ideological positions on education policy. The Socialist Party appeared effectively ‘captured’ by the interests of teachers, so this gave license for the UMP party to establish a policy position contrary to the teachers’ unions, and purportedly in support of the interests of other educational stakeholders (such as middle-class parents and business interests). Education research – state-sanctioned or otherwise – seemed to be meaningful inasmuch as it could substantiate the policy
preferences of one or the other political party. State actors tried to remain neutral and objective, but inevitably their data was co-opted by the governing political party and criticized by corporate actors and pundits.\textsuperscript{220} In 2007, Sarkozy campaigned and won on a platform of public sector reform, which included education. The setting for a partisan political reform was highly favourable: changes to macro-political institutions made the Élysée even more powerful than previously; it was early in the electoral cycle so the national government need not fear immediate electoral punishment; and evidence of policy failure from PISA seemed to confirm the problem as defined by the governing party. Furthermore, electoral incentives during 2008 encouraged the UMP party to neglect representatives from teachers’ unions.\textsuperscript{221}

The government had the formal political power to realize existing (partisan) policy preferences, because their opponents could do little to veto them in conventional policy-making arenas. In short, here was an agenda-setter facing remote electoral sanction and no formal veto constraints, yet they substantially accommodated the preferences of partisan rivals. Why, then, did partisan politics not prevail?

\textit{Macro-Political Arenas of Competition}

During this particular punctuation in the policy equilibrium, the failure of partisan politics was due to volatility and contingency in macro-political arenas of competition. Unpredictable things can happen when political conflicts escalate. In this case, the large and increasingly fractious public demonstrations coincided with the death of a student in Athens. Although this critical juncture may or may not have

\textsuperscript{220} As previously noted, even the modes of research seemed to facilitate broad normative debates rather than conclusive findings: “There were a lot of institutions doing research on didactics, within particular subject domains. There was not much research on educational economics, psychometrics, indeed even on pedagogy, until much more recently...Besides, in France, there wasn’t much to research when it came to education – because education is a matter of ideology! Public debates on education involved representatives from teachers’ unions, pundits, and so on. They did not ask experts in pedagogy or educational economics, for example. It is an area where everyone is an expert!” (Émin interview 2014).

\textsuperscript{221} This refers to unexpected electoral defeats for the UMP in municipal elections in March 2008. “Politicians in France, at every level, are sensitive to public opinion and the media. This is not merely due to coverage of public events like strikes and demonstrations. It is also because there are so many elections in France at the various levels, which all have an impact on each other, and an impact on policy-making. It is this constant cycle of elections that tends to politicize many issues, and of course, education is included in this because it is ubiquitous and requires coordination at so many levels. Policymakers are sensitive to elections and public opinion, and as a result, much of the education policy discourse becomes politicized” (van Zanten interview 2014).
been the catalyst that pushed Sarkozy to reconsider both the reforms and the reform process (as well as the toxicity of his minister, Darcos), this was more than a just a tactical withdrawal from the public arena of competition. The Sarkozy administration underestimated the importance of subsystem politics, and if they wanted to accomplish any education reforms, even restricted ones, they must do so through sectoral policy design institutions. Roger-François Gauthier, a veteran of subsystem politics in education, summed it up this way:

“Where does political power lie in French education? Certainly not in regional governments or in school administrations. The system remains highly centralized. Yet also not in the hands of the Minister of Education. You can look back at the list of Ministers over the last several years, many of whom tried to reform the education system. For the most part, they left office as ‘beaten dogs’. They have all the formal power, yet little effective power. We are the only country in Europe in which the education system shuts down due to strikes on average for three weeks per year!” (Gauthier interview 2014)

Clearly, partisanship mattered in France, but so too did policy performance. The outcome in the French case indicates that Sarkozy was willing to forego ideological and partisan policy preferences in order to secure policies that would be implemented, allowing education issues to escape public attention and revert back to management in policy subsystems.

4.7 Conclusions from the French Case

The policy change outcome in France could not be predicted by an agenda-management model, but the policy-making process contributes leverage to this model of policy change. The policy status quo was simply more resilient in France, as was demonstrated by the obstruction of reforms during this punctuation in the policy equilibrium. An attempt at significant reform following poor PISA results in 2007 was overturned by President Sarkozy, and much lesser forms of policy change followed with Chatel’s Lycée pour tous reforms in 2010. Initially, Minister Darcos looked to the evaluation policy monopoly to assist in the design of reforms. As it became clear that some subsystem actors did not share his interpretation of issues, Darcos used institutionalized venue-control mechanisms to ignore pressure participants who did not agree with his broader vision for education. As a monopoly, it lacked
robust mechanisms for internal conflict management, and quickly destabilized. The unstable policy subsystem, led by Darcos and the DEPP, could not manage the reform agenda once the neglected pressure participants had succeeded in moving the venue for policy debate out of conventional policy-making fora. The conflict escalated, a very public ‘street brawl’ ensued, and the policy-making process took on the dynamics of an agenda-setting model, including monopoly breakdown and a high degree of unpredictability. Thus, the mechanisms of change in a Punctuated Equilibrium Framework – framing and venue-shopping – could also be mechanisms of policy stability. Although the French case does not prove that an oligopoly is likely sufficient for a significant change in instrumental logic, it does demonstrate that the lack of a stable subsystem is a substantial impediment for a change in instrumentation. When compared to alternative explanations such as policy internationalization or partisan politics, the agenda-management model is a more compelling explanation for policy change, within the scope conditions evident in France between 2007 and 2010.

The French case helps our understanding of the Punctured Equilibrium Framework by demonstrating that radical policy change can be highly constrained by institutional instability. The greater complexity of this obstructed reform scenario is not fully theorized here, yet once the unstable subsystem failed to manage the macro-political agenda, the French case conformed to a conventional agenda-setting model. This not only had implications for policy, but also for policy subsystems. Sarkozy re-started the policy development process by having Descoings engage in public consultations. It was as if the government was no longer interested in consulting any monopoly, that policy was now going to emerge ‘from the public’ rather than the subsystem. Thus, the policy monopoly broke up, and small perturbations had large and unpredictable effects. These processes make the agenda-management model more plausible, not less. In other words, the events within the punctuation do not demonstrate the failure of an agenda-management model, they demonstrate how the subsystem failed to manage the agenda. Moreover, the French case has another implication for the PEF: change and stability are not
necessarily separate dynamics occurring during distinct temporal episodes. The French case
demonstrates that a punctuation in the policy equilibrium should not be defined by degree of policy
change alone, because there can be conditions when desired policy change is obstructed during
favourable reform episodes, despite the political intentions or policy preferences of powerful agenda-
setters.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this dissertation, I present an agenda-management model of the relationship between subsystem politics and forms of policy change during punctuations in policy equilibria. More specifically, I claim that the type of policy design institution is pivotal for understanding how reforms are managed or mismanaged, during policy-making episodes when non-governmental organizations have drawn attention to shortcomings in the status quo. One type of subsystem in particular, a policy oligopoly, is especially conducive to managed reforms under these conditions. Oligopolies are stable subsystems that can translate their framing of issues into policy decisions at the macro-level, by managing the reform agenda and controlling the venues for discussions about policy development. As an institution that makes sense of policy choices, oligopolies can focus attention within issue areas, such that instruments for governance or policy implementation can be significantly changed while broader policy aims are preserved. Meanwhile, unstable subsystems transmit their meso-level instability up to the macro-level. An unstable policy monopoly will fail to manage the reform agenda or control venues for policy debate during punctuations in policy equilibria, leading to risky political strategies by various political and policy actors, and unpredictable policy outcomes. Although actors in the macro-political arena set reform agendas, actors in narrower policy subsystems can shape that agenda and retain core aspects of the status quo, if these sense-making institutions are stable and coherent.

By examining attempts at education reform following poor PISA results in Germany and France, I developed this argument about agenda-management in four stages. First, I discussed the political and policy status quo that pertained to each case, explaining the antecedent conditions and background contexts prior to punctuations in education policy equilibria. Second, I elaborated on the patterns of policy change during the punctuations, and described the variance between managed reforms in Germany (leading to a change in instrumentation) versus mismanaged and obstructed reforms in France (leading to incremental change and the resilience of the status quo). Third, I elaborated on the
properties of different subsystem types, and provided evidence for their existence, which allowed me to demonstrate the effects of subsystems during punctuations in policy equilibria. Fundamentally, I argued that a German oligopoly managed reforms by framing education issues as problems with instrumental solutions, and controlling venues for policy discussion, whereas an unstable monopoly in France led to struggles over how issues were framed and where policy design was debated, ultimately resulting in the obstruction of reform. The contrast between a significant yet managed policy change, and a kind of well-publicized ‘street fight’ leading to a reversion to the policy status quo, is exemplified by education reforms in Germany and France, post-PISA.

This agenda-management model substantiates two inter-related claims about the relationship between policy design institutions and policy change during disruptions to the status quo. First, that stable policy design institutions – such as oligopolies – can control the form of policy change by framing issues as manageable and controlling venues where policy is discussed. From this claim, I assert that a policy oligopoly greatly increases the likelihood for significant change in the instrumental logic of education policy, across a particular range of cases. Second, that stable policy design institutions which can manage the policy agenda can also influence their own destiny. I argue that subsystem stability will translate to subsystem durability during punctuations in policy equilibria. These propositions do not emanate from a predictive model, nor a generalized theory of policy change. Instead I take a ‘causes-of-effects’ approach, and develop this model as a plausibility probe for explaining instrumentation under particular institutional conditions and political circumstances.\textsuperscript{222} Indeed, this agenda-management model can only fully explain one of the two cases presented in this dissertation (Germany), because the

\textsuperscript{222} The ‘causes-of-effects’ approach seeks a sufficient explanation for a particular phenomenon, such as necessary and/or sufficient conditions (Goertz and Mahoney 2012, chap. 3). This approach is most prevalent in qualitative research, and is distinct from the ‘effects-of-causes’ approach typically found in quantitative correlational research.
eventual outcome for the negative case (France) was largely unpredictable. However, the negative case does provide analytical leverage for determining the likely conditions for an intermediate form of policy change, and for the durability of policy design institutions. Determining whether this model would apply beyond the scope conditions, or rigorously testing which factors are necessary for a change in instrumentation, requires further research.

This concluding chapter contains six sections, each pertaining to a particular task. The first task is to specify the scope conditions over which I expect an agenda-management model to be relevant for instrumental forms of policy change. The second involves situating the German and French cases within this scope, and briefly discussing the cross-case comparison. This demonstrates that an agenda-management model is not only the most plausible explanation for the phenomena analyzed here, but also explains crucial aspects of partisanship and policy internationalization in the macro-political sphere.

In Section Three I broaden the discussion to include more general theories in political science, and how one might integrate an agenda-management model with other theories of the policy process and institutional change. In Section Four, I propose an agenda for future research, which entails avenues for theory building, theory extension, and theory testing. In Section Five, I re-state the contributions this dissertation makes to our understanding of policy change, and more generally, to research on comparative politics. In the final section, I discuss the implications of these findings for education reform.

Theorizing the absence of policy change is a tricky business. Change leaves clear evidence of an outcome because policy must be formalized. A prevailing status quo leaves scant evidence in terms of outcome, yet can leave distinctive traces in terms of process. Examining only the outcome in France, there would be no way of knowing if incremental change was the result of a modest agenda, a formal veto in the macro-political arena, or an ‘informal veto’ manifest through subsystem politics. However, there are ways to assess a negative outcome by closely examining the process that led to absence. Furthermore, and consistent with the expectations of PEF, political activity that occurred during the puncture in the equilibrium can have highly unpredictable effects, with small events potentially having large and unforeseen consequences. My point here is that effects during episodes of disequilibrium can be rendered more stable and predictable, but only if sectoral institutions are themselves stable and predictable. Where they are not, policy change outcomes can vary from no change to complete transformation, and depend on phenomena in the macro-political arena or public sphere.
5.1 Scope conditions: The Possible Cases

Subsystem politics can shape a range of policy outcomes and policy-making processes, yet are especially relevant for understanding changes to instruments, often better known as ‘second order’ change. Within this range of phenomena, there are also particular forms of change, such as the calibration of an existing policy instrument or the introduction of new instrumental logics. The cases here pertain especially to a subset of instrument reform in which formal policies transform the governance and evaluation of a sector without shifting its broad policy aims, significantly altering but not upending the policy status quo. For the sake of theory building, I am also interested in cases with clear yet unsuccessful attempts at significant change to instrumental logic. Analyzing these outcomes will help construct a theory about the influence of subsystem politics on policy change, and could eventually establish the necessary and sufficient conditions for changes in instrumentation. Moreover, this would allow an agenda-management model to move from a descriptive middle-range theory about the cases presented here, to a more prescriptive model of policy change.

Notwithstanding, some cases are likely to remain outside the scope of an agenda-management model due to circumstances or scope conditions at the micro- or macro-levels of decision-making. I anticipate different change dynamics, and likely different outcomes altogether, under three circumstances: where a policy issue has little political ambiguity, where the government is not required to negotiate with policy implementers, or where the attention of decision-makers is progressively drawn to issues by ‘internal’ actors. Without these scope conditions (political ambiguity, state insulation, and acute external pressure), even changes to instrumentation are likely to be explicable via another process with a different set of causal mechanisms, and by factors in the macro-political realm.
5.1.1 Micro-level Scope Condition: Political Ambiguity

Most public policy problems – education reform among them – are characterized by high levels of complexity. However, there are policy areas in which problem-solving is complicated by a high degree of political ambiguity, because challenges to the policy status quo also represent challenges to the political status quo. Political ambiguity exists when issues have technical and social dimensions yet also contain additional uncertainty regarding how technical and social dimensions will be handled, and whether policies will be implemented as intended. Political ambiguity affects decision-making at the ‘micro-level’ – it changes how individuals perceive problems and solutions. High-level decision-makers reconsider which issues demand intervention, and whether that intervention will have ramifications for policy or politics. Much of this tension derives from different claims of authority, and the types of evidence that actors use to make authority claims. Government actors are legitimate due to representation of the public interest, evidenced in public opinion or electoral mandates. State actors typically claim authority from scientific expertise, evidenced by empirical research. Pressure participants claim authority from implementation expertise, evidenced by understanding of local context and what ‘works’. Ultimately, decision-makers must determine which forms of authority and which types of evidence are acceptable.

This discussion builds on an approach to education reform which involves the application of ‘complexity theory’ (Snyder 2013). In this approach, problems are classified as simple, complicated, or complex. Simple problems are formulaic, with workable solutions that can be easily replicated (akin to following a recipe). Complicated problems require higher order expertise across multiple fields (such as sending a rocket to the moon). Although simple and complicated problems are different in many ways, they are similar in that solutions are replicable, tend to improve with repetition, and successful problem-solving is unambiguous (i.e., short of redefining the problems, problems that get solved stay solved). Complex problems are qualitatively different: formula have limited application; repetition and high-level expertise can contribute but are neither necessary nor sufficient for success; and uncertainty is a persistent feature even after problems have been solved. An example of a complex problem is raising a child (see Glouberman and Zimmerman 2004). Indeed, most problems tackled by the social sciences, education included, are complex problems. Some problems within the realm of public policy add a further layer of complexity, in terms of challenges presented by implementation and governance (i.e., many actors, ambiguous preferences, opacity in the policy process, uncertainty around implementation, and so on).
evidence matter most. Sense-making institutions are a means to manage this information, and clarify not only technical and social uncertainty, but also political ambiguity.\textsuperscript{225}

This micro-level scope condition delimits the range of possible cases for analysis (outcomes notwithstanding), vis-à-vis a consideration of policy areas characterized by high degrees of political ambiguity. This remains a scope condition, meaning that it does not overdetermine policy change outcomes. A need for sense-making institutions does not presuppose which institutions matter most (such as subsystems, political parties or international organizations) nor that decision-makers will heed advice emerging from stable institutions rather than their own personal ideas or interests. These dynamics must be tested empirically, even in policy areas where issues are politically ambiguous.

5.1.2 Macro-level Scope Condition: State Insulation

Some cases of policy change fall outside the scope of an agenda-management model due to a constellation of macro-level variables that preclude certain types of activities in policy communities or subsystems. The types of subsystems I discuss in this dissertation are manifestations of neo-corporate relations, not the ‘iron triangles’ or loose policy networks found in certain policy areas or more pluralist regimes. The actors might be similar – elected government, bureaucracy and pressure participants – but their relations are quite different. Subsystems in insulating policy-making regimes must involve a negotiation between the state and policy implementers at some point, if not by virtue of customary involvement in policy design, then later via accountability mechanisms such as codified rules of collective bargaining. Cases beyond this scope will exhibit relations between actors which are ostensibly voluntary, involving strategies like pork-barrelling, lobbying, public protest, and so on. For example, due

\textsuperscript{225} To revisit the connection between institutions and uncertainty; many issues that draw the attention of high-level decision-makers require additional information to manage risk and ignorance. Boundedly-rational policy-makers are not omniscient and use a myriad of strategies to respond to limitations in time, information, and cognitive abilities. One strategy is to look for ‘cognitive shortcuts’ to comprehension, such as causal theories emergent from particular paradigms. Another is to focus on certain aspects of an issue at the expense of others, in order to solve problems in a pragmatic, manageable way. A third is to avoid radical change, given uncertainty about the effects of policy. Sense-making institutions can offer any of the above.
to market dynamics and patterns of Congressional bargaining, one would not expect meso-level institutions to be the deciding factor for healthcare reform in the US. Certainly, there was a healthcare policy community, but given the prevailing market logic, there were no norms or rules that required the state to protect policy implementers and formally negotiate the implications of policy with them. Thus, American healthcare reform is likely the effect of other policy-making dynamics, such as agenda-setting or an Advocacy Coalition Framework. For subsystem politics to be a difference-maker, the state must insulate the policy sector and negotiate with public employees, in some fashion. We typically see this macro-level scope condition in particular types of welfare state regime, including but not exclusive to France and Germany. More important than regime type is sector governance, because if the state dominates the provision of public goods then state insulation is a scope condition, despite a more liberal or pluralist welfare state regime.

5.1.3 Macro-level Scope Condition: Acute External Pressure

The final macro-level scope condition relates to the nature of the reform agenda, namely, the way that elected government has been induced to intervene in a policy area. I propose that an agenda-management model can explain certain forms of policy change in a range of cases where there has been ‘acute external pressure’. This refers to cases where the reform agenda has been set by decision-makers independent of the policy subsystem (such as politicians in the government executive). It also refers to cases where credible non-governmental or international organizations present evidence that has discredited the policy status quo. This scope condition distinguishes between a subset of outcomes strongly influenced (but not entirely determined) by subsystem politics, from reforms induced by community ‘insiders’ or other actors in the domestic macro-political sphere.

Acute external pressure sets apart cases of interest, where change is the result of interactions between sectoral and political institutions, from cases where change is the result of a process within a policy sector typically occurring over a longer period of time. For the latter, policy processes and
outcomes are likely to be highly determined by subsystem politics, more so than the cases presented in this dissertation. Rather than distinct punctuations in policy equilibria, one anticipates endogenous learning processes. If concrete moments of change can be identified, then subsystem actors with the capacity to set a reform agenda are also likely to fully control that agenda and the venues of policy design. A case in point is the evolution of vocational training regimes in Germany. Over time, pressure participants worked with state bureaucrats to change not only the instruments of governance, but also the broad aims of this policy area (Culpepper and Thelen 2008). In effect, an evolutionary paradigm shift in German vocational training policy was highly determined by sectoral institutions, not political ones. Where acute external pressure matters, we would see macro-political actors set the agenda, and subsystem actors trying to shape it. Neither the process nor the outcome would be a foregone conclusion, and empirical analysis would reveal which cases there would be a subsystem with the requisite properties to manage a reform agenda.

This scope condition also separates out those cases that are highly determined by macro-political institutions, in which the pressure for policy change is acute yet emanating from domestic political actors. The clearest examples come from electoral turnover, where a new government arrives with a reform agenda independent of acute pressure generated by civil society organizations (transnational or otherwise). For these cases, change outcomes largely depend on macro-political institutions, i.e., the number of veto players or sequence of veto points. Typically, we would anticipate majoritarian systems to adhere to a ‘stop-go’ policy style that results in large swings in policy orientation following elections, and consensus-oriented systems (with coalition governments) to experience lesser degrees of change. Furthermore, for these cases of acute ‘domestic’ pressure, the causal mechanisms are likely to manifest through political rather than subsystemic institutions. Policies would begin to develop inside political parties, according to partisan ideologies and anticipating electoral returns. Examples are many: the Hartz reforms to the German labour market and welfare policies following the
2002 Federal election, or the reform of the British National Health Service following the 1987 election. Even the French lycée reforms analyzed here began as a domestic reform agenda, during the 2007 elections. However, PISA shockwaves altered the urgency and trajectory of these reforms, such that this case moved from a (domestic) agenda-setting dynamic to an agenda-management dynamic (and back again during the disorderly reform episode). Agenda-type is a scope condition and not a causal mechanism for policy change, because it acts as an ‘external irritant’ to a policy area, compelling actors in domestic institutions to carefully consider the design of reform, and who might shoulder the blame for past failure.

The scope of the agenda is a macro-level condition, and this, along with sectoral regime-type and political problematization (i.e., state insulation and political ambiguity, respectively), determine the range of possible cases for analysis by an agenda-management model. I now turn to a discussion of these factors for the cases analyzed in this dissertation.

5.2 Cross-national Comparison: Implications of Subsystem Politics for Other Models

Given the scope conditions above, Germany and France are suitable cases for the preliminary construction of a theory about the relationship between meso-level institutions and intermediate forms of policy change. Comparative process-tracing this positive and negative case of change in instrumentation allows me to draw causal inferences and formulate a plausible explanation for the phenomena described here. In this section, I summarize the case comparison in order to demonstrate the plausibility of explanations which focus on subsystem politics, as well as consider some of the implications of meso-level institutions for other explanations of policy change, namely partisan politics and policy internationalization.

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226 These three examples also demonstrate that domestic reform pressure need not be the result of electoral defeat for the incumbent party. An incumbent party can retain power in an election, yet also be prepared to exert acute pressure on a policy area if they are victorious (on the assumption that the victory gave them a popular mandate for reform). There are many more examples of acute domestic pressure exerted by parties moving from opposition into government.
In an environment where an external information shock can discredit an insulated sector like education, stable subsystems that convey a coherent policy image can manage this information for decision-makers, by finding a balance between transformation and the existing status quo. In Germany, the policy oligopoly (centered around the Amtschefskommission) managed the reform agenda and kept policy development within the KMK, despite protracted debates about education in the macro-political and public spheres. As a result of this agenda management, the KMK and Länder Ministries could control the new logic of instrumentation (via the Institute for Quality Development in Education) as well as further evidence-gathering (through PISA-E and VERA tests). In France, an unstable policy monopoly (centred on Darcos, de Gaudemar and the DEPP) mismanaged the reform agenda and lost control of policy development. As a result of agenda mismanagement, pressure participants adopted the risky strategy of moving the policy discussion ‘to the street’, in the form of mass demonstrations and strikes. In the end, the politicization of the agenda undermined both the monopoly and the reform proposals, as Sarkozy backed down from a reorientation of education and a new logic of contractualization, as well as turned to a new process of policy design. Thus, I argue that a policy oligopoly is highly likely to result in change to instrumental logic during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium. Subsystem politics mattered very much for these outcomes, but did not determine them alone; factors from the macro-political arena were also meaningful.

In this dissertation, a meso-level analysis of policy-making connects the ‘micro-foundations’ of individual behaviour to the policy outcomes and national/global trends visible at the macro-level. At the micro-level, individual behaviour requires some theoretical basis, and my assumption (consistent with the PEF), is that actors have relatively stable preferences – I am not proposing a model about cognitive processes or preference formation. However, a meso-level analysis does have implications for the behaviour of individuals: sectoral institutions shape the processes that lead from the stable goals of disparate actors to final policy choices (aggregated or otherwise). Institutions do this by reducing
uncertainty for macro-political actors (structuring incentives so actors can prioritize preferences), and enabling subsystem strategies like framing or venue-control (shaping agendas and influencing deliberation). The dynamics that occur within sectoral institutions and between policy-making venues can also account for variation at the macro-level. Subsystems can be decisive for the formal policy decisions made in the ‘high’ executive, as well as help explain state behaviour relative to the pressures of globalization. An analysis of subsystem politics adds to our understanding of the domestic drivers of internationalization, as well as what exactly is converging when we speak of internationalization.227 Furthermore, subsystems partially constitute distinctive national policy ‘styles’ or ‘cultures’, which have led to persistent cross-national divergence in policy outputs and patterns of authority.228 A meso-level analysis cannot explain every policy outcome. However, a better understanding of subsystem politics closes gaps in our knowledge about forms of policy change, as well as the domestic forces which drive and constrain the forces of globalization. Below, I explain how meso-level institutions can shape the effects of other factors like partisan politics and policy internationalization, and the implications of this for our understanding of macro-political variables and mechanisms.

A partisan politics model argues that policy outcomes were determined by electoral competition, with political parties forming distinct ideological positions on education in order to attract potential blocs of voters or retain alliances with interest groups. Parties in Germany and France had clear preferences when it came to the broad aims of education policy, historically manifest in choices about education structures or levels of funding. Parties also formed durable associations with teachers’ groups prior to the reform episode. However, there is little evidence that policies were designed outside

227 Subsystems affect forms and degrees of policy change, although the specific content of policy can derive from a number of (often indiscernible) sources.
228 It should come as no surprise that the national structures of education policy-making have remained so distinct, given the loci of authority. Even in policy areas where one would anticipate strong structural and cultural convergence – such as policies of European integration – we see little evidence of institutional emulation. “Here, as elsewhere, external pressures will tend to be accommodated by incremental adjustments which reflect distinctive prior paths of institutional development.” (Harmsen 1999, 107).
of the structures of state and government, such as in party organizations. Indeed, meso-level sectoral institutions appeared to influence the way that party leaders (as heads of government) prioritized their interests, as they perceived that retaining political control over the policy area (and claiming credit for problem-solving) was more important than optimizing policy goals on the basis of partisan ideology. In Germany, the oligopoly shaped the decision-making processes and policy change outcomes in the macro-political sphere, vis-à-vis private discussions between representatives of government, state and corporate actors, which led to the bipartisan ‘Catalogue for Action’. Subsystem politics was also influential in decision-making and policy outcomes in France, even though the existing monopoly mismanaged the reforms. If not for subsystem politics, Sarkozy would not have bothered with such an elaborate policy design process (as his UMP party had the means to design and implement the reforms they wanted). And he certainly would not have obstructed the reform outcomes as much as he did.

From the reforms and reform episodes assessed here, we can see that partisan politics was meaningful. However, given the scope conditions, partisan politics was perhaps a contextual factor, with subsystem politics a proximate cause for the form of policy change. One conclusion that can be drawn from this: there is indeed a ‘new politics of education’, but it goes beyond explaining levels of expenditure based on party preferences. The new politics of education also pertains to other types of reform, and relationships between governing parties and policy design institutions.

The ‘internationalization of education policy’ model argues that (national) outcomes were largely determined via lesson-drawing from transnational actors, with international organizations using different instruments to diffuse ideas and communicate a model of global best practice. The OECD Directorate of Education was influential in Germany and France, as is clear from the establishment of national PISA Consortia and the responsiveness of governments to poor PISA rankings. However, there is little evidence that policies were designed specifically to emulate the ‘PISA model’, especially as PISA
could indicate problems but not specify causation in each case. Meso-level sectoral institutions were needed to shape national responses to PISA, because high-level decision-makers required help with designing specific policy solutions. In Germany, the oligopoly was the institutional mechanism through which learning from international comparisons could occur, and initially, lessons were drawn only at the subsystemic level. The release of the Catalogue of Action a mere 48 hours after the poor PISA ranking was not sufficient time for actors in the macro-political arena to learn what PISA meant, have a change in policy beliefs, and form an advocacy coalition for reform. In France, the unstable monopoly vacillated for years on the learning value of PISA assessments, until a poor PISA ranking made reforms expedient for the government. And in both France and Germany, policy outcomes hardly emulated global best practice. Given the scope conditions, PISA was meaningful for these reform episodes but only because subsystem politics translated that meaning into the domestic sphere.

The implications for an internationalization of education policy are threefold. First, PISA has shaped a global education discourse which has been diffusing into national spheres, but discourses only set agendas, they do not design policy. The design and implementation of a domestic policy agenda is still up to national actors. Second, PISA is an example of ‘soft power’ exerted by international organizations, using mechanisms such as peer pressure, or recommendations from authoritative (and purportedly impartial) knowledge-makers (Figazzolo 2009, 7). Determined national actors with ‘hard’

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229 Much of the discourse around a ‘PISA model for education’ was actually generated within national public spheres, by the media or government. As a senior manager at the OECD (working on PISA) put it: “PISA does not advocate a model of education. We just look at various education systems, and make a synthetic analysis of the top performing systems (as well as the fast improving systems) and describe the characteristics of those systems, some of the common features. We also don’t suggest that it is possible to insert these features into an existing system. There is not a single model. We recognize that each system is at a different stage of evolution” (Anon 24 interview 2014).

230 Rather than ‘discourse’, some have referred to the PISA effect as the emergence of an ‘audit culture’ in national education regimes, a culture which emphasizes innovation, accountability and self-directed education institutions (Kamens 2013). Whether described as a discourse or culture, the PISA effect on the cases here is a contextual factor rather than causal mechanism for specific national education policies.
power can still resist these pressures. Finally, it remains to be seen if there really has been an internationalization of education, inasmuch as national systems of education are converging. From an analysis of Germany and France, I argue that there has been a clear convergence of discourses, as well as a common desire (on the part of governments) to move towards a culture of accountability in educational governance. However, this dissertation contributes to findings which show that actual national policy responses have been globally convergent and divergent (see Wiseman 2013). It remains an open question as to which direction the globalization of education will go in the future.

5.3 Extending the Theory: Complementarity with Other Theories of Change

This model has demonstrated its utility for explaining the policy process in compulsory education, yet the logic behind subsystem politics can also provide insights for other theories of change in political science. The clearest connection is between agenda-management and agenda-setting, with both models operating within the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework. One could think of agenda-management as complementary to the broader agenda-setting model; a refinement which explains the durability of the political and policy status quo under particular scope conditions (a form of agenda-setting which leads to moderated change outcomes). In this section, I explore how an analysis of subsystem politics could be integrated into other traditions of scholarship in comparative public policy and historical institutionalism.

5.3.1 Relationship between Institutional Change and Policy Change

In the empirical chapters of this dissertation, there were brief discussions regarding the emergence of a national policy oligopoly in Germany and destabilization of the monopoly in France. While institutional change is beyond the analytical scope of this research, I advance the notion that institutional and policy

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231 That said, the OECD’s soft power is becoming increasingly difficult to resist as it strengthens and expands its global educational brand, and sets a *global* education policy agenda (H.-D. Meyer and Benavot 2013).

232 “*PISA* might become what Bourdieu called a ‘strong discourse’—‘impossible to refute and typically self-fulfilling, comparable to psychiatric discourse in an asylum’.” (H.-D. Meyer and Benavot 2013, 21).
change are related. It is within national policy-making institutions that learning occurs, partisan positions are debated, and policy decisions are made. So, when institutional arrangements change, I anticipate that so too would ideas, partisan positions, and the decision-making capacities of actors within those institutions. Below, I expand on the possible relationship between endogenous institutional change and intermediate forms of policy change, suggesting that subsystem politics might connect the two.

The conceptual evolution of subsystems, from exclusionary ‘subgovernments’ towards looser policy networks, has mirrored trends in empirical findings. Small, tightly-knit ‘iron triangles’ are no longer able to exclude experts and broader groups of stakeholders, with Hugh Heclo (1978) commenting on the decline of the ‘clubby days of Washington’ in American policy-making, where “issues once quietly managed by a small group of insiders have now become controversial and politicized.” This phenomenon – the exposure of issues once tightly controlled by subsystems – reached continental Europe by the 1980s and 1990s, often characterized as an effect of globalization. Indeed, this has been an effect of globalization, although not always globalization ‘from above’ (i.e., imposed by governments or through intergovernmental organizations). Rather, it might be a kind of globalization ‘from below’, with subsystemic actors increasingly involved in transnational epistemic communities, and serving as conveyor belts to transmit new ideas into the heart of the state’s policy-making apparatus (Skogstad 2011). Subsystems in neo-corporatist countries tried to resist the penetration of new actors, but were unlikely to do so indefinitely. The way that subsystems have formed and reformed in certain countries and policy areas seems meaningful for policy change outcomes. There is the possibility of a causal connection between types of institutional change and the degree of policy change, and arguably, political behaviour in subsystems is an intervening variable between the two.\textsuperscript{233}

\textsuperscript{233} It is unlikely that institutional change and policy change correlate directly, due to time lags and the agency of actors in subsystems. “Securing policy stability means maintaining arrangements of institutional intimacy between a group of political and scientific actors, averting issue expansion and politicization. Challenging policy images and building a new policy monopoly can take different routes” (Timmermans and Scholten 2006, 1115). Hypothetically,
The Punctuated Equilibrium Framework has suggested that monopolies change by being destroyed and reformed during punctuations in the policy equilibrium, because the reframing of policy renders a subsystem obsolete and empowers other policy actors. Observations of the cases here suggest that subsystems can change in different ways: some collapsing dramatically, others morphing or disintegrating slowly. Take Germany for example: during the 1990s, a new type of education researcher began to usurp the once-dominant role played by teachers’ organizations (supported by their ideological allies in university education departments and political parties). The authority of this new subsystemic actor was based on their more scientific approach and appearance of impartiality, rather than on stakeholder ‘rights’. In France, subsystem instability was an indicator of a more protracted disintegration in institutional relationships, eventually leading to the dramatic collapse of the monopoly during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium. These cases suggest that the types of endogenous institutional change described by Streeck and Thelen (2005) could be relevant for understanding subsystem politics and degrees of policy change. Because rigid, hierarchical monopolies offer actors little room for manoeuvre, perhaps these institutions succumb to ‘drift’ and ‘displacement’. Where there is sufficient political space for new institutional forms, one might anticipate the ‘layering’ of new subsystems over existing ones, or the ‘conversion’ of existing subsystems towards new functions (Ibid., 26-31). This preliminary foray attempts to logically connect policy change and subsystem politics to historical institutionalism, and offers an opportunity for further research.

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234 Arguably, the ‘modernization’ of German education relates to a very slow paradigm shift in approaches to teaching and educational research (albeit not paradigmatic policy change). For decades, German education was dominated by philosophy and the humanities. Beginning in the 1990s, a shift to a positivist, social scientific approach was evident in both research and pedagogy (Döbert, Klieme, and Sroka 2004c, 336–44).

235 Drift refers to “the neglect of institutional maintenance in spite of external change, resulting in slippage in institutional practice on the ground” (Streeck and Thelen 2005, 31). The lack of restructuring and re-stabilization can – but not must – result in institutional ‘displacement’ or ‘exhaustion’ during a punctuation in the policy equilibrium, with actors defecting from the dysfunctional institution.

236 A feature of these forms of institutional change is the use of existing institutional resources. Perhaps this explains why the education policy subsystem took on an oligopolistic structure in Germany: because the KMK were
5.3.2 Relationship between Subsystem Politics and Knowledge Mobilization

Extending the focal point to consider policy areas beyond education, there is the potential for complementarity between theories of subsystem politics and theories that evaluate the role of expert knowledge in policy-making. Much has been written about the transition to ‘post-political’ governance, and the rise of technocracy. In recent years, these political and sociological theories have been empirically grounded in studies of policy-making, such as Christina Boswell's (2009) analysis of the symbolic use of expert knowledge in immigration policy-making, or Campbell and Pederson’s (2011, 2014) theory about the development of knowledge regimes for macro-economic policy. Models of subsystem politics could serve as a bridge between (older) patterns of policy-making which primarily involved interest mobilization, and newer patterns involving knowledge mobilization. An agenda-management model could do this by theorizing the ways that institutions structure the interests of actors, who then try to mobilize different forms of knowledge during the policy process.

Theories that emphasize interest mobilization are far from obsolete. There are many areas of public policy where patterns of state intervention can still be clearly linked to interest group politics, either because the costs and benefits of policy affect the strategies of interest groups (Wilson 1980) or due to the characteristics of the policy itself (i.e., as distributive, redistributive, or regulatory, see Lowi 1964, 1972). Mobilizing interests is likely to remain salient for many areas of social policy, within which responsive to existing institutional forms, like collaborative federalism, when they sought a new kind of policy design institution to inform their choices. This fits an argument that the development of bureaucratic organizations is driven by a kind of ‘institutional genetics’ (Moe and Caldwell 1994).

Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have written extensively about a shift from the politics of redistribution (pertaining mainly to social welfare policies) towards a new ‘politics of the self’, which has rendered obsolete the old class-based, ideological battles fought by political parties and trade unions. This ‘third way’ politics has engendered governance via technical expertise, which Chantal Mouffe has criticized for being ‘post-Parliamentary’ democracy because citizens and voters are no longer presented with real political choices. Undoubtedly, the third way has been a general phenomenon for public policies, and a philosophy used by both the right and the left in Europe. Looking again at the French case, sociologist Romuald Norman observed: “The DEPP [has been] an instrument of ‘the third way’. The tools of New Public Management have been introduced in a sort of bipartisan agreement between politicians and technocrats on both the left and the right. Now, no one challenges the DEPP” (Norman interview 2014).
education has often been subsumed. However, Harold Wilensky was perhaps correct in arguing that social and education policies are inherently different, and thus require analytical strategies which systematically distinguish between them (Wilensky 1975). For Wilensky, this difference was related to distinct principles of social justice that the two policy-types served, i.e., equality of opportunity for education versus equality of outcome for social welfare. Forty years later, with the advent of third way politics, we could re-frame this in terms of principles of risk management: education is governed as a (public) insurance scheme and not a system for solidarity and redistribution, and this is what continues to set it apart from social welfare. In short, policy-makers who must primarily assess and manage risk will need expert knowledge in order to understand causal complexity and the statistical probability of certain outcomes. Therefore, theories of interest mobilization have diminishing utility for the analysis of policy areas which are primarily about assessing and insuring against risk, of which education is one.

The politics of subsystems, as conceptualized in this dissertation, really refers to the mobilization of knowledge (not interests in the conventional sense, such as class-based, partisan, etc.). The term ‘subsystem politics’ encapsulates a struggle between abstract knowledge (of state bureaucrats and their civil society consultants), practical knowledge (of teachers and ‘implementation experts’), and pragmatic knowledge (of elected government assessing the politically possible). Some have taken a rather benign view of this ‘cognitive dimension’ of politics. However, I share with Boswell, Campbell

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238 In policy terms, there are three models for the relationship between education and social policy (see Busemeyer and Nikolai 2010). Scholars have observed that the USA (unlike Europe) tended to treat these policies as functionally equivalent and *substitutable*, i.e., investments in education were actually investments in social welfare, and thus the US would trade-off investments in social welfare for investments in education (Heclo 1985, 16; Heidenheimer 1981). Thomas H. Marshall believed these policies were separate and *complementary* – education was a right of citizenship and so too was social welfare, but education provided for political equality while social policies secured economic equality. A more recent model, a ‘social investment state’ proposed by Anthony Giddens among others, suggests that education and social policy are *supplementary*, with education as an enhanced form of active labour market policy (Busemeyer and Nikolai 2010; Jenson 2012). Some welfare states regard education as integral to social policy, while others have separated them in terms of politics and the actors involved in policy-making (Allmendinger and Leibfried 2003).

239 Some authors (see Radaelli 1999) have asserted that knowledge mobilization is a reflection of the technical complexity of a policy area (or issue), particularly in areas of ‘radical uncertainty’ where there are global systemic risks. It is in these areas where you see knowledge mobilization and ‘post-adversarial politics’: “Learning, problem-
and Pederson the perspective that expert knowledge is often abused, and knowledge actors are themselves political players. Politicians and bureaucrats frequently use expert knowledge symbolically, for political ends, to substantiate existing policy preferences or legitimize their authority (Boswell 2009). For their part, civil society actors have sometimes been willing participants in the misuse of knowledge, if it allows them to consolidate power, acquire legitimacy, or leads to material gain. Indeed, all subsystemic actors have an interest in having their knowledge pre-eminent in the policy-making process, so in this sense, patterns of knowledge mobilization can still be understood in terms of utility-maximization rather than social learning. Where a theory of subsystem politics can help, and can dovetail with theories of knowledge mobilization, is by uncovering and assessing policy-making processes which are insulated from public scrutiny. The complexity of modern public policy requires the mobilization of knowledge, yet the opacity of modern policy processes requires theorization of who is conceiving of policy, and who is excluded from the design process. In the next section, I suggest public policies (other than social welfare) that could be appropriate for building an agenda-management model, and perhaps also for integrating this model with theories of knowledge mobilization.

5.4 A Future Research Agenda

The agenda-management model presented here is a kind of plausibility probe for the development of a theory about the relationship between two understudied political phenomena: subsystem politics and educational policy change. As such, verification of the initial findings in this dissertation will require substantial additional work. The section that follows suggests three different avenues for further research. The first pertains to theory building and modification, which could establish some of the necessary conditions for change in instrumental logics. The second seeks to extend the theory in order solving attitudes, fora of debate, and policy enlightenment – it is argued – can be more relevant than adversarial politics. Is then public policy moving beyond adversarial democracy? (Radaelli 1999, 758).

240 The internationalization of education policy simply added another dimension to this abuse of expertise. The ‘cloud of data’ produced by PISA does not make educational policy-making transparent, but rather, allows policy actors to justify any of their preconceived ideas (H.-D. Meyer and Benavot 2013, 21).
to determine sufficient conditions for changes to instrumentation. And the third involves theory testing, to verify necessary and sufficient conditions for instrument transformation.

This dissertation has argued that an oligopoly is a likely condition for a significant change in the instrumental logic of education policy, during punctuations in the policy equilibrium. A close analysis of a positive and negative case indicated this, but more cases would be required to confirm it as a sufficient condition, as well as to assess the necessary conditions for changes to instrumentation. When adding comparative cases, they must first exhibit the outcomes of interest (positive or negative), given the scope conditions. They could then be categorized as ‘most similar’ or ‘most different’ systems of policymaking, compared to the positive case in German compulsory education (see Przeworski and Teune 1970). Likely comparators for positive cases include: Dutch and Canadian postal services in the early to mid-1980s; British compulsory education in the mid-1980s and healthcare policy in the early 1990s; higher education policy in Germany and France in the 2000s; and American compulsory education in the 21st century. I am also interested in negative cases, where attempts at re-instrumentation were unsuccessful, such as the failed attempts to transform public administration in Brazil during the mid-1990s, or failed attempts to streamline postal service management in the UK and EU during the early 1990s. The research design would extend from the methodology used in this dissertation: comparative

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241 A brief description of the latter cases, which offer the most promising case studies to explore next. In France, the 2007 law on the Liberties and Responsibilities of Universities (LRU) significantly changed instruments of university governance and involved ‘contractualization’. Although there was moderate public opposition from teacher-researchers, their inclusion in the policy design process seemed to be reflected in favourable policy outcomes, as they were empowered on executive boards of universities. Students had diminished representation in university governance in spite of massive protests in late 2007. Working outside the policy design process only won them a temporary reprieve in cost increases. Reforms to US compulsory education offer a fascinating comparison to Germany, and one that demonstrates that characteristics of the policy area are more salient than welfare state regime-type, as far as subsystem politics are concerned. The 2002 No Child Left Behind law had scope conditions appropriate to an agenda-management model, and an outcome similar to Germany: instrument transformation. Thirteen years later, educational governance and evaluation was once again transformed by the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act. A careful process tracing of the interactions between the Bush or Obama administrations, state and federal departments of education, and the major teachers’ unions at the national level (the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers) could reveal much about the dynamics of policy oligopolies, and confirm or amend the necessary conditions for instrument transformation.
process tracing, in order to establish the existence of stable subsystems in most similar cases and
unstable subsystems in most different cases. The change in instrumental logics – given conditions where
other policy change outcomes are also possible – is not unique to the cases examined here, and thus
adding cases is a means to establish necessary conditions, and build the theory.

A second avenue for research would be to deepen the analysis of the cases presented here,
assessing the degree to which processes of institutional change have shaped subsystem politics, and
thus led to different forms of policy change. More extensive process tracing of German and French
compulsory education could reveal that significant change to instrumental logics occurred in
jurisdictions which underwent significant institutional transformations. Such a finding could raise the
possibility of theorizing sufficient conditions for change in instrumentation. This avenue would extend
the model of agenda-management, incorporating models of institutional and policy change, and possibly
produce a more generalized theory about the role of subsystem politics.

A final approach would be to undertake theory testing of the results, using Qualitative
Comparative Analysis (QCA) across a medium-N of cases (gleaned from the proposed analyses above).242
Charles Ragin (2000) conceived of a mode of analysis – ‘fuzzy-set social science’ – where one can identify
or test necessary and sufficient causal conditions without assuming that the explanans or explanandum
have absolute values, like total presence or absence. The idea is to use valid and consistent criteria to
transform relatively unsystematic qualitative evidence into fuzzy sets, where cases can have different
levels of membership (full presence = 1, total absence = zero, various gradations in between, and a clear
cross-over point in the middle). The research process would involve building and extending the theory
(as above), in order to get a deeper understanding of the likely necessary and sufficient causal

242 Conventional (large-N) correlational analysis would be extremely challenging, not only because of the salience
of mechanisms and processes, but also because of difficulties converting qualitatively-interpreted features of the
model into valid, reliable, and crisply-defined dependent or independent variables. Even if this could be done, it
would take a very long time to build up a sufficient universe of cases, in order to create a data set worthy of
statistical analysis.
conditions, and to determine robust criteria for the fuzzy sets. To cite a hypothetical example from compulsory education, the German oligopoly and French monopoly might be coded 0.75 and 0.25 respectively, in a fuzzy set for subsystem stability (using robust and transparent rules for coding). Adding cases would yield a larger stability set, until such time that a set was sufficient to permit estimations of the relationship between stability and instrument change using regression analysis. I estimate that a medium-N of perhaps twelve to fifteen cases would be required to reach conventionally acceptable levels of confidence. One could continue with each potential necessary or sufficient causal condition, and even represent the continuum of policy instrument change by a fuzzy set. Once all sets have been coded and checked for reliability, one could then test the hypothetical propositions that emerge from an agenda-management model (i.e., the conditions that are necessary and/or sufficient for certain forms of intermediate policy change). In this way, I could move from theory building to theory extension to theory testing, in order to eventually make more robust claims about subsystem politics and intermediate forms of policy change.

5.5 Contributions to Comparative Politics

In developing an agenda-management model of education policy change, this dissertation advances our understanding of comparative politics in a number of ways. First, using the underexplored area of compulsory education, this analysis proposes new ways to better conceptualize ‘second order’ policy change. Second, the study of subsystem politics draws attention to the meso-level, and the degree to which these institutions can determine policy outcomes as well as illuminate aspects of comparative politics (such as the seeming paradox of increasing globalization yet distinct national policy styles). And finally, the concept of a policy oligopoly encourages comparative politics scholars to think about how institutions can be powerfully self-reinforcing, not only through the policy world but also in the realm of politics and polities.
Changes to policy instruments have frequently been analyzed by public policy scholars in order to explain other phenomena, yet ‘instrumentation’ is an outcome worthy of study in its own right. Some forms of ‘second order’ change – such as changes to instrumental logic – retain significant aspects of the status quo and yet can also lead to profound ‘downstream’ effects on policies, politics or even polities. The type of instrument change that occurred in Germany post-PISA might be an example of what Michael Hayes (2001) called dramaturgical incrementalism – symbolic changes made by politicians in response to public arousal. Nonetheless, even managed reforms can have real and significant effects over time (Timmermans and Scholten 2006). By conceptualizing different forms of intermediate policy change during punctuations in policy equilibria, this analysis suggests ways that incrementalism and transformative policy change can be linked rather than treated as distinct phenomena. Furthermore, by expanding the focus to include not only cases where changes in instrumentation occurred, but also where it was possible (even attempted) yet did not occur, this dissertation expands the universe of relevant cases, and contributes to the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework by trying to correct for selection bias in the study of policy change.

Furthermore, this study of meso-level policy design institutions has provided some insight into why there seems to be nationally-distinct and even sector-specific ‘policy styles’, and why globalization yields surprising outcomes at the national level.²⁴³ An analysis of subsystem politics in these two cases has demonstrated that there are different ways to deal with the overcrowding of voices in policy-making, and the growth of unconventional participation. These national and sectoral differences are just as important as differences in macro-political institutions. Moreover, subsystem politics also goes some

²⁴³ The evidence in this dissertation suggests that Richardson’s (1982) tentative conclusions about national policy styles were correct: behavioural patterns (and not norms) seem to determine policy style, and this behaviour is structured by historically-generated institutions. In a sense, the persistence (or rapid change) of institutional structure is what creates (or shifts) culture. To put this another way, my findings concur with the discursive institutionalism of Vivien Schmidt (2008) inasmuch as there seems to be a regular state of affairs in which institutions structure discourses, and rarer periods when discourses and ideas drive institutional change.
way to explaining how education policy has become internationalized. An examination of deviant cases with surprising outcomes suggests that internationalization can also occur from the ‘bottom-up’, especially in policy sectors that are well-insulated from the pressures of globalization. By focusing on the ‘receiving’ side of policy transfer and diffusion, one gets a more complete picture of the processes of internationalization.

Finally, by introducing the concept of a policy oligopoly, this dissertation provides a concrete analytical tool for understanding the development of policy. Moreover, the concept speaks to questions about how institutions can be self-reinforcing. In arguing that the form and stability of sectoral institutions relates to the form and degree of policy change, we are invited to consider the ways that institutional structures perpetuate themselves across different fora. For example, the creation of a national policy oligopoly seems to have emerged from the institutional blueprint of collaborative federalism. The success of this oligopoly in managing educational reform has also been instrumental in perpetuating collaborative federalism. During the Federalism Reform in 2006, the KMK could point to their success in reforming education policy as justification for exclusive powers in this policy area. In sum, the oligopoly concept is useful for thinking about modes of institutional ‘structuration’ in comparative politics, with formal policy being only the most obvious example.

5.6 Implications for Reform of Education

The policy outcomes and processes that emerged in Germany and France post-PISA, invite us to consider what is at stake when public education systems undergo reform. This era of burgeoning internationalization and technocratic policy-making can facilitate learning opportunities, but also conceal power from public view. There are a number of implications that could be drawn from this dissertation. In this section, I focus on two which have profound ramifications for how policy-makers conceive of the education policy design process. The first asks policy-makers – as well as education stakeholders and the general public – to think about what we mean when we say ‘evidenced-based
policy-making’. The second suggests that many reforms are essentially statements of educational and sometimes even societal values, and therefore we need to reconsider institutional design at the sectoral level to ensure that meso-level institutions are sufficiently representative and deliberative.

Despite the rhetoric surrounding ‘evidenced-based policy’, this term has often come to mean the symbolic use of evidence to justify rather than guide policy choices. Relevant actors are powerfully motivated to control policy outputs, so many will frame their preferences in terms of the common good, supported by scientific evidence. In the context of education, evidence has become a key element in the arsenal of political struggle. Powerful actors have the most access to this arsenal, using evidence or expert authority for credit-claiming or blame-shifting rather than real learning. However, our demands that politicians (or the public for that matter) engage in real policy learning is perhaps a bridge too far, given limited attention and cognitive capacity. It is perhaps more realistic to have education stakeholders – such as those in subsystems – actively engaged in learning. To do this, ‘local’ experts and international organizations must optimize learning tools so that they are not misleading or prone to abuse. PISA is a case in point. PISA findings can be very informative about education systems, but PISA rankings tend to serve as a ‘political technology’ (Grek 2009), providing little evidence of anything educational. Furthermore, PISA remains poorly understood by experts, never mind politicians or the public. There would still be a need for international organizations (alongside domestic experts) to facilitate cross-national policy learning, especially from ‘peers’ with similar educational structures and cultures. Yet there are a number of ways that such evidence about education systems could be better communicated: elimination of naming-and-shaming aspects (such as ordinal rankings); more accessible ‘open-source’ data; greater transparency in the relationships between experts and decision-makers; and information ‘brokers’ who can communicate findings – and the limitations of evidence – in ordinary
None of these can fully safeguard against an abuse of evidence by political actors, but they could check the worst abuses and might lead to ‘evidence-informed’ policy, at least. One hopes that these steps would lead to a more considered reflection by policy-makers, rather than the current rush to reform after each round of global ranking.

Within the domestic realm, evidence can also be used as a way of avoiding conflict and concealing power. By framing policy problems as solvable given sufficiently robust evidence, and proposing technical or instrumental solutions, one can circumvent difficult political decisions involving core values or interests. However, many aspects of education reform are fundamentally choices about societal or educational values. While political compromise can be commendable for making progress, it can also hide challenging truths, or delay difficult choices. In other words, politicization is not always a bad thing, nor is it ubiquitously progressive to decide policy through a rationalized, technocratic ‘science of governing’. If there is a facile lesson from this research, it is that policy-makers would do well to frame issues as technical if only to manage the number of participants in the design process. The deeper lesson, however, is to consider how institutional design might be improved, such that policy-making could accommodate more perspectives. I argue that broadening participation in the policy process need not be an impediment to effective policy-making, with the oligopoly in German education as a testament to this. While far from perfect (in process or outcome), the oligopoly was a move towards a non-majoritarian, deliberative institution during this era of post-Parliamentary governance. Rather than increase Parliamentary forms of governance such as partisan voting or committees of non-experts and non-users, perhaps institutions that facilitate the networking of public and private actors – and hold them both to account – are what we need. Clearly, the minutiae of institutional design will be important, and not something that I elaborate further here. Suffice to say that we can know from inputs

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Some of these communicative aspects are already underway at the OECD, namely educating teachers and other publics about PISA, its strengths, and limitations.
and outputs whether a policy design institution is properly representative and deliberative. Inputs refer to participation: the institution must be broadly representative of education (and for some issues, society at large). Neither the French monopoly nor the German oligopoly went nearly far enough in this regard. The policy outputs must be flexible and adaptable, because of the complexity of modern public policy (education included). In this, the German oligopoly was somewhat successful with their ‘Catalogue of Action’, inasmuch as it was an ‘incompletely theorized agreement’ that left certain issues unresolved at the level of politics. Trying to resolve every problem at the political level will actually stifle progress, and some things are best entrusted to ‘street level bureaucrats’ who understand local context. Policy design institutions which facilitate participation and deliberation can represent multiple views, yet also allow innovation. Educational sociologist, Romuald Norman, reminds us of this:

“the resistance to new accountability instruments was not really a question of resistance from left or right, but between top and bottom. This is not new – the system of administrators and inspectors [in France] used to called ‘the Red Army’, after all. Yet, over the last 20 years or so, there has been a great deal of change in how education operates ‘on the ground’, with some motivated teachers and administrators trying to innovate. But this innovation is not a response to policy reforms – it is in spite of it” (Norman interview 2014).

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245 “Incompletely theorized agreements originate with conflicting opinions on the common good and conclude with participants agreeing on a single outcome, but for different reasons...[these agreements] do not fulfill the demands of the criterion of mutual justification ‘all the way down.’ By definition such agreements leave certain issues unresolved...To the degree that the parties can genuinely offer one another [reasonable] justifications, based not only on the need to find a modus vivendi but on mutual respect for the other’s premises, the process of generating incompletely theorized agreements meets the deliberative criteria of mutual justification, mutual respect, reciprocity, fairness, equality among participants, and the absence of coercive power” (Mansbridge et al. 2010, 70–71)
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Appendix A: Indicators for Structure of a Germany National Oligopoly

Institutional Indicators
Revisiting the structural indicators for a policy oligopoly, one can see that they all pertain to Germany at the national level during the late 1990s. It was the *Kultusministerkonferenz* that established the boundaries and membership of this policy community. The formal criteria for participation existed within the operating rules of the KMK itself, as established by prior KMK agreement or ‘treaty’ [*Beschluss*]. Each of the sixteen Länder Ministers had to agree to policy decisions, while other actors in the executive or legislative branches at the Land-level, as well as Bundes-bodies, were excluded from decision-making. The KMK Secretariat – at the behest of the Ministers – then established or enforced other institutional aspects of a national policy oligopoly. By establishing the *Amtschefskommission*, they delimited ministerial and departmental participation in the policy subsystem. By recognizing and responding to teachers’ codetermination in the Länder Ministries, and by inviting the GEW Executive into policy design discussions, the KMK acknowledged the rights of certain pressure participants to the exclusion of others. That the Education Ministers would then deliberate over the reform agenda with the *Amtschefskommission* and the PISA Consortium was formalized and explicit: the former because of KMK procedures for establishing commissions or committees, and the latter vis-à-vis the 1997 Constance Agreement. That the GEW Executive had been invited to review policy design was more by informal agreement than explicit covenant, but because the highly influential chair of the committee (Lange) had insisted on it, this amounted to some participation rights for the teachers’ association. Finally, there was an administrative body which managed participation and communication in this national policy subsystem. That body was the KMK Presidium and Secretariat, responsible for the organization of all meetings through which members of the oligopoly could meet to deliberate with one another, as well as meetings where they could consult with ‘outsiders’.\(^{246}\)

Behavioural Indicators
The behaviour of actors within the oligopoly was consistent with the institutions established by the KMK. The membership recognized the legitimacy of each others’ participation in the policy design process, even if they could not agree on generalized aims of education policy. As an oligopoly, they cohered around predictable coalitions which mirrored the KMK itself: the KMK plenary and the *Amtschefskommission* represented the disparate interests of A- and B-Länder; the interests of teachers were considered via the GEW Executive, or else not discussed (in the case of the school stratification); and the PISA Consortium was expected to define problems, not provide policy solutions which might be perceived as partisan. Therefore, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, all the institutional and behavioural indicators for a policy oligopoly were present at the national level in Germany.

\(^{246}\) In March of 1999, the KMK was reformed by internal agreement amongst the Ministers. Although the overall number of committees in the KMK was reduced by one third, the KMK presidium was granted additional agenda-setting powers in the area of education. The goals of the KMK were concentrated on assuring the creation of quality standards in education, in order to achieve ‘the highest attainable standard of real mobility’ between the Länder while still allowing for local innovation and diversity. The KMK was henceforth to be the forum for critical discussion of all inter-Länder education issues. Furthermore, the agenda-setting role of the KMK presidium was strengthened so that decision-making amongst Ministers could be streamlined (Sekretariat der KMK 1999).
Appendix B: Indicators for Policy Image of a Germany National Oligopoly

Institutional Indicators
The institutional acknowledgement of a shared policy image was captured by the Constance Agreement, established via KMK plenary in 1997. In effect, the Constance Agreement consolidated the boundaries and mandate of the national policy oligopoly. It called for cooperation between the Länder, and for the Länder to observe certain kinds of educational research when developing quality assurance policies. Inasmuch as these issues affected teachers (standards, external evaluations, teacher training), representatives of teachers in the GEW executive endorsed this policy image.

Behavioural Indicators
The behavioural evidence that all actors in the oligopoly accepted the jurisdictional and technical boundaries of the issue: it was a matter that would be worked out within the KMK, based on particular forms of evidence, and through the use of certain quality assurance instruments (administered by subsystem actors). Consistent with expectations of a policy oligopoly, the shared policy image did not make claims about educational philosophies or values. The subsystemic actors understood that each other’s interests and values were not aligned, and so constructed a policy image that avoided them. In this way, the policy image could divert negative (public) attention by framing the issues raised by PISA in terms of ‘what already works’ and ‘what remains yet unclear’.
Appendix C: Indicators for Stability of a Germany National Oligopoly

The institutional and behavioural characteristics of the oligopoly suggest that conflict was managed internally in order that stability could be projected externally.

**Institutional Indicators**
There was an institution that narrowed the terms of reference and the scope of deliberation: the *Amtschefskommission* and its consultation structure. It was not merely that this particular *Amtschefskommission* ‘*Qualitätssicherung in Schulen*’ existed, but rather, that there was a durable and flexible mechanism within the KMK for delegating authority (commissions), and that they were given a specific scope of activity.

**Behavioural Indicators**
Behaviourally, subsystemic actors respected the scope and authority of this commission, reinforcing its stability. Certain pressure participants were invited to deliberate in exclusive, private and reiterated meetings, which engendered trust and socialization. There was a tacit understanding that for a durable and flexible policy community to persist, certain subjects were relatively taboo (such as school structure) and certain ‘less important’ actors would need to be excluded. Although evidence of such taboos and exclusions is not explicit, the very fact that these issues did not emerge from the oligopoly is implicit evidence that conflict was managed internally.
Appendix D: Indicators for Structure of French Subsystem

The subsystem in France had a monopolistic structure, but membership was ambiguous and evolved during the punctuation, resulting in instability.

**Institutional Indicators**

The first institutional indicator is formal or informal criteria for subsystem membership by state actors. The French policy monopoly had informal criteria for determining which bureaucratic actors should provide input to the policy design process, traditionally delineated on the basis of function (such as technical expertise or prescribed consultation), institutional position (such as the organizational structure of departments and sub-departments), and occasionally, spillover (when policies affect the domains of other departments or ministries). During the 2000s, norms regarding hierarchy and jurisdiction were made ambiguous by sweeping legislation like the LOLF. Furthermore, within the Education Ministry, segmentation and deconcentration meant that government actors exercised their jurisdiction in a culture of competition rather than cooperation. Silos persisted as departments and agencies consolidated their roles and responsibilities, yet the years leading up to the punctuation in the equilibrium were marked by ambiguity due to departmental reorganization and the creation of new consultative bodies. Certain types of educational research – PISA especially – seemed to inform policy decisions, but this did not mean that education researchers (government-sanctioned or otherwise) had to be included in the monopoly. Therefore, the informal criteria for including particular state actors in a policy monopoly was sufficiently ambiguous for Darcos to re-structure the subsystem to include the DEPP and not other state actors.

The second indicator of structure was a set of codified rights or informal norms allowing pressure participants to have legitimate representation within a subsystem, and contribute to policy decisions. Historically, there were strong norms regarding inclusion of teachers’ unions, if no other group of stakeholders, and new practices gave the appearance that teachers were still included. One such practice was the creation of the Superior Council for Education (CSE) in 1989. The CSE seemed to formally incorporate teachers into the policy-making process, yet for most teachers’ unions, this was never the preferred means of influencing policy development. This was because the CSE was created just as demands for representation by stakeholder groups were proliferating. The two major teachers’ unions understandably reverted to past practice, of direct deliberation with government actors over the content of reform. The policy development process had all the formal trappings of a monopoly – it excluded most groups except teachers, it appeared to codify existing norms of deliberation – yet in practice, the monopoly was ‘hollow’ for pressure participants. The norms of monopoly continued to exist, but the Minister could exploit ways to subvert them in order to ignore undesired pressure participants.

The final institutional indicator for a policy monopoly, the existence of formal or informal agreements for rules of deliberation and consultation, were open to manipulation by a determined executive. Some rules of consultation had been codified in past legislation, such as the creation of the HCE and CSE, intended to give an avenue for consultation or collective voice to pressure participants. However, neither of these bodies were given deliberative power, in the way that the committee structure and secretariat in the KMK forced bureaucrats in the German oligopoly to find common ground or abandon the process. Nonetheless, there were also informal norms regarding deliberation.

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247 A civil servant with DGESCO informed me that “there have always been silos within the Ministry. There have been few systematic connections or collaborations between DGESCO and the Inspectorate General, for example. And the relationship between DGESCO and DEPP has been especially difficult in recent years” (Robert interview 2014).
with major teachers’ unions. Collective bargaining in French education was essentially a set of rules for deliberation which both sides honoured more in letter than in spirit. The Ministry fought to ensure that collective bargaining had limited extension, arguing that only aspects of education policy that directly impacted labour conditions should be negotiable. Precedent meant that teachers understood this to mean almost everything, and certainly this meant measures affecting governance of quality assurance. Darcos tested these institutional norms, using his special negotiation protocols.

Behavioural Indicators
A policy monopoly should have behavioural evidence involving some mutual recognition of legitimacy and rights amongst actors within the policy community. In other words, those within the monopoly should behave as if there was a monopoly, recognizing the basic legitimacy of other actors and respecting mutually agreed-upon policy design, at least over the short term. For decades, the traditional monopolistic actors (the leadership from teachers’ unions and the central executive) demonstrated this respect and recognition, even begrudgingly. Respect was based on a general consensus regarding educational values (including the state’s responsibility for upholding Republican principles) as well as an implicit understanding that teachers and inspectors were pedagogical and curricular experts, by virtue of traditions like the strenuous concours exams and standard-setting by the IGEN. Through the 2000s, however, this mutual recognition and respect became a façade, a façade that broke down during the punctuation in the policy equilibrium. To the frustration of both government and other teachers’ unions, SNES-FSU leadership had a record of negotiating agreements, then refusing to sign after publication because doing so would undermine leverage within their own constituency (Norman interview 2014). For their part, the ministerial cabinet began to resent unions en masse, actively seeking new partners for policy conversations, such as the Montaigne Institute. It was no longer clear to the actors themselves which coalitions mattered, nor what the other actors really wanted (unlike the German oligopoly with its clear coalitions and predictable, enduring policy preferences). However, none of this was clear in late 2007, when the policy equilibrium was punctuated. In 2007 and early 2008, some saw Darcos as a defender of corporate interests. There was a mutual recognition of rights amongst actors in the community, but the mismatch in ideological commitments suggested that a shared sense of legitimacy was disintegrating. As the monopoly destabilized, outward behaviours grew increasingly intransigent. and monopoly ‘partners’ began to publicly blame one another for problems with French education, rather than discuss them together.

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248 Educational sociologist, Annabelle Allouch: “There is a new form of post-bureaucratic governance; maybe it could be called an ‘accountability of trust’? Policy design is based on personal connections...elite institutions and personal relations are the truly important factors in the policy-making process. Interpersonal relations are replacing traditional ‘normative relations’ such as using official circulars to communicate policy. This is a new articulation of policy-making, with new actors, and excludes other actors previously involved” (Allouch interview 2014).
Appendix E: Indicators for Image of French Subsystem

For such a policy monopoly to exist, we would expect evidence on four indicators of a shared policy image, one ‘institutional’ and three ‘behavioural’. The existence of a shared policy image is what matters for demonstrating a monopoly, and not the hidden motivations or personal ideas of the actors within (on which we can speculate but seldom demonstrate).

Institutional Indicators
An indicator of institutionalization would be some public legislation or mandate which identified an issue and the actors who should resolve it. General aspects of the policy image were institutionalized in the Fillon law and the LOLF, the same legislation which established the new role for the DEPP. The Fillon law made specific reference to PISA and put emphasis in the importance of skills acquisition, system performance, and effective evaluation mechanisms. The LOLF consolidated a program for public sector efficiency and the creation of a culture of accountability. The DEPP was also given a central (advisory) role in policy decisions about measurement and governance of education, befitting a set of problems that revolved around evaluation, performance, and system-wide governance. Institutionalizing this policy image as a reform agenda would come from the new Sarkozy government, with a public mandate that Sarkozy presented to Darcos on 5 July 2007 (Sarkozy 2007).

Behavioural Indicators
The behavioural indicators should demonstrate the following: a mutual understanding of the boundaries of a problem (that puts it within the jurisdiction of a particular policy community); agreement on expert authority; and basic agreement on the technical aspects of an issue (i.e., the logic that links outcomes to a particular cause, and argues against the status quo).249

The ideal governance argumentaire outlined the boundaries of the problem and the policy community that was responsible for fixing it. The problem, as defined by the new monopoly, was largely about poor system performance and inefficient governance. The Sarkozy mandate called for “an independent and regular evaluation of our entire education system so that the political authorities can make the decisions necessary to ensure the quality of the school and its ability to meet the requirements and expectations of the contemporary world” (Sarkozy 2007). The appropriate community for designing solutions was therefore composed of political governors (i.e., the Minister) informed by system-wide evaluations by objective technical experts (i.e., the DEPP), with input from those that must implement the policies (i.e., pressure participants). How that community managed the issues was not prescribed.

The Minister used this mandate not only to establish the boundaries of a policy community, but also the types of expertise needed for policy design: the DEPP and PISA were authoritative, with other actors or methods of assessment useful but not necessarily for the issues at hand. Although the DEPP had already developed diagnostic tests of basic skills based on PISA (the CEDRE tests), more would be demanded of them as they were integrated into policy design.250 A high level civil servant working in the

249 A further behavioural indicator that distinguishes a monopoly from an oligopoly is the degree to which fundamental interests and values are assumed within a monopoly, while avoided in an oligopoly. In a monopoly, actors typically assume that they share a basic understanding of a problem for a given issue area, so they make argumentative claims based on overlapping paradigms or philosophies. In an oligopoly, actors see the problems differently, so they assiduously avoid claims that invoke fundamental interests or values in order to reach a policy design modus vivendi. This indicator has not been developed further here, because it indicates only the type of subsystem involved and not if there was a subsystem at all.

250 The DEPP would be made responsible for delivering system-wide formative assessments designed by DGESCO for primary and lower secondary (the CE1 and CM2 tests). These tests continue, and arguably, have the largest
DEPP at the time spoke of the sudden demand for new mechanisms assessing system components and that the “key aspect of this new evaluation regime was not diagnostics, but comparability” (Anon 17 interview 2014). The work of other actors – even those responsible for assessment or programming, such as the IGEN or DGESCO – was not retarded, but considered largely irrelevant for understanding performance problems or for governing the system as a whole.251

As a final behavioural indicator of a shared policy image, the framing of education as failing in particular ways ensured that both PISA and the DEPP were useful for interpreting the technical dimensions of a problematic status quo. Underwhelming PISA scores had been around for years, but by late 2007, PISA rankings had become politically useful for symbolizing the failures of French education.252 After the punctuation in the equilibrium had begun, it became expedient for the monopoly to then have the technical aspects of PISA translated for public consumption, with the DEPP cast in the role of expert consultant (often only symbolically, as many of the policy ideas emanated from other éminence grise). To the benefit of the high executive, the expert role of the DEPP was largely accepted within the Ministerial bureaucracy and even among education stakeholders (multiple interviewees confirmed this). Monopoly actors could all agree on the credibility of the DEPP, whereas PISA was initially questionable for a number of bureaucrats and stakeholders. However, it quickly became an unavoidable part of the discourse surrounding education – in the words of political scientist Xavier Pons, “PISA was more a grammar than a learning tool” (Pons interview 2014). Actors within the new policy monopoly behaved as if the problems in French education were largely technical or instrumental again (i.e., pertaining to assessment and governance), and thus the remit of governors within the high executive informed by technocratic advisors (and to some degree, the concerns of the ‘implementation experts’ – teachers).

impact on decision-making by teachers. However, political actors wanted new types of assessments to make decisions about system-wide governance – almost as if what happened at the system level was largely unrelated to what happened in the classroom.

251 Thus, in both Germany and France, particular forms of evidence were valued more than others: quantitative, system-wide tests counted for more than qualitative, context-specific or diagnostic assessments. However, in France, authority flowed from institutional position, not scientific expertise. The DEPP were the experts because they were institutionally responsible for performance, not because they had expertise with psychometrics and comparative large-scale assessment. Moreover, the DEPP had begun to embrace PISA between 2004 and 2006, likely as much to consolidate power as out of respect for what PISA could teach about education systems. Political scientist, Xavier Pons: “The shift was rapid but subtle. Even during the DEP’s second press conference after the release of the 2003 PISA results [in December 2004], you could still see the old DEP position about the shortcomings of PISA methodology. Yet by January 2005, the new Director of DEP held a press conference, saying ‘we can learn from PISA’” (Pons interview 2014).

252 “[T]here were] unmistakeable signs of a radical shift in the process where decision-makers become explicitly invested in the [PISA] survey and made a call out to all pertinent actors to enter the national public debate. Therefore, it was in fact a change in the political atmosphere that led to a change in awareness [of PISA] rather than the other way around” (Mons and Pons 2009, 113).
Appendix F: Indicators for Stability of French Subsystem

Subsystem stability has one institutional and two behavioural indicators: institutions which determine the scope of issues, evidence of deliberation amongst members of the monopoly, and shared norms of privacy amongst community members.

Institutional Indicators
Stability is indicated by the presence of institutional mechanisms which depoliticize issues, such as an agreement to deliberate over technical aspects or to disaggregate policy into sub-dimensions. For the French monopoly, these institutions had been hollowed out: The Minister seemed to be deciding for himself about the scope of the issues, who should be consulted, and how. A distinctive aspect of French education – and perhaps all policy monopolies in France – has been the degree to which the governing style of the Minister now seems to matter. Unlike in Germany, where the KMK had clear rules of engagement and the key government agents were State Secretaries (not Ministers), the French monopoly was strongly influenced by the interpersonal relationships and leadership style of the Minister himself. Institutionalized mechanisms of conflict management build trust between actors, while unclear norms of reciprocity can be easily co-opted. Prior to 2006, decisions about curriculum and (student) performance were competences shared between teachers and the Ministry (as codified by the 1989 Jospin Law). After the Fillon law, the Common Core became the guide for curricular decisions (with the HCE advising the Minister on modes of implementation) and (system) performance was the remit of the DEPP. Over the course of the ‘republic of teachers’ era, the role of particular pressure participants in the process of policy design had become vague. The creation of the CSE in the early 1990s had opened up avenues for consultation, but the interests of teachers were diluted in this forum, so teachers’ unions looked to traditional norms of informal deliberation to stabilize their place in the monopoly. However, there was no independent agency or agreement to determine the scope of issues or the jurisdiction of actors, so who should be involved in policy design appeared arbitrary or ideological. The institutional mechanisms for depoliticizing issues and stabilizing the monopoly had slowly eroded during the years before the punctuation.

Behavioural Indicators
Communicative behaviour amongst members of the monopoly had evolved in the institutional vacuum, such that private deliberation was being replaced by public posturing. Whereas before there were norms regarding privacy for deliberation or consultation, communication through public media further destabilized relationships. The closing off of avenues for deliberation lead to communication through press releases, by both corporate and government actors. An official in the DEPP recalled: “[In the early 2000s], the DEP invited teachers’ unions and parents’ associations to hear about our activities, but that practice has long been abandoned. Now, our director communicates with the stakeholders and the public through the press, and only in anticipation of some event like PISA” (Anon 17 interview 2014). This eroded trust between members of the old policy community, and made them wary of expressing true preferences lest it be used against them in public. In principle, there were institutions that could facilitate depoliticizing behaviours (like private deliberation), but in practice, monopoly actors no longer trusted these institutions, or each other.
## Appendix G: Interview Methods

*Table 2: Interview Methods Table*

(Format for every interview was semi-structured)

(‘Sat?’ indicates saturation for perspectives/information; ‘Confid’ refers to requests for confidentiality)

<table>
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<th>Source</th>
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<td>30 Sept 2013</td>
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<td>Hugonnier, Bernard</td>
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<td>Aschieri, Gérard</td>
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<td>10 April 2014 1h25</td>
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<td>Interviewee</td>
<td>Type of actor/Organizational position</td>
<td>Date, Duration</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Sat.?</td>
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<td>Former Secretary General of the Federated Trade Union for Education (FSU) from 2001-2010</td>
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<td>Researcher and liaison (French Desk)</td>
<td>10 April 2014</td>
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<td>• Educational Sociologist</td>
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<td>Gauthier, Roger-François</td>
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<td>• Former Director-General of the National Centre for Documentation of Pedagogy (CNDP)</td>
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<td>• Inspector-General for Administration of National Education and Research (IGAENR)</td>
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<td>• Member of Superior Council for Programs (CSP) as curriculum policy expert</td>
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<td>Anon 20</td>
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<td>14 April 2014</td>
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<td>• member of Superior Council for Education (CSE)</td>
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<td>2 May 2014</td>
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<td>Forestier, Christian</td>
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<td>6 May 2014</td>
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<td>• former Directeur du cabinet for Education Minister Jack Lang (2000-2002),</td>
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<td>20 March 2014</td>
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<td>Interviewee</td>
<td>Type of actor/Organizational position</td>
<td>Date, Duration</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Sat.?</td>
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| International | Senior Policy Officer and Researcher  
- Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) at OECD | 14 April 2014  
1h10 | Referred | (yes) | Yes |
Appendix H: Primary Documents
(Germany)

Baumert, Jürgen, and Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung Arbeitsgruppe Bildungsbericht. 1994. 
Das Bildungswesen in Der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Strukturen Und Entwicklungen Im Überblick. Berlin: Rowohlt.


Aus Den Ergebnissen von ‘PISA II.’ Online at http://www.dgb.de/einblick

GEW (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft). 2001. “PISA...und was in Deutschland anders ist”. Online at www.gew.de


KMK (Kultusministerkonferenz). 2015. “Ständige Konferenz Der Kultusminister Der Länder in Der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.” Bonn: KMK.


(France)


