

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Policy dimension: A new concept to distinguish substance from process in the Narrative Policy Framework

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Abstract

This article introduces the distinction between substance (questions of policy design) and process (questions of power in the policy process) to the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). While both occur in existing NPF research, so far, they are not separated analytically. We conceptualize them as categories of the “policy dimension,” a new aspect of narrative content. Applying this dimension to an exploratory case, we show that such an analysis leads to useful insights for NPF scholars. *Substance* policy narrative elements show a debate about a policy's implementation model, whereas *process* policy narrative elements reveal that this debate is permeated by power conflicts. Furthermore, we find that the two categories' occurrence in narratives is influenced by the debate venue, whereas political parties as narrators do not seem to be relevant. The policy dimension allows for new research avenues and provides practitioners with a new tool to understand and intervene in policy debates.

KEYWORDS

child and adult protection policy, Narrative Policy Framework, policy dimension, substance and process

INTRODUCING A NEW CONCEPT TO THE NARRATIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK

Within less than 10 years, the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) has been established as a major theory in policy research (Shanahan et al., 2017) and has produced a plethora of compelling empirical analyses (Schlaufer et al., 2022; Stauffer & Kuenzler, 2021). The systematic measurement and analysis of narratives enhance researchers' understanding of the nature of policy debates, including their drivers and effects.

Still, the NPF overlooks a basic, yet fundamental distinction that prevents it from doing full justice to the empirical reality it studies: The difference between policy narrative elements that focus on a policy's substance or its process. In policy sciences, this distinction is well-established and materializes in two elab-

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orated research strands: Policy design and evaluation studies (Knoepfel et al., 2007; Pleger et al., 2018) as well as policy process research (Weible & Sabatier, 2017). Whereas the former address the societal impact of a policy through its specific configuration—i.e., its problem definition, policy instruments, designation of target groups, etc.—the latter is concerned with a policy's life cycle, meaning the different stages it traverses, the societal dynamics evolving around it and the factors causing a policy to change.

The distinction between a policy's substance and the process is not only prevalent in research but also manifests in societal debates on policies—and hence in policy narratives. To give a hypothetical example:

Narrative 1: «We need to stop fossil fuel companies from jeopardizing our children's future by preventing them from extracting climate-damaging energy sources.»

Narrative 2: «We need to stop fossil fuel companies from jeopardizing our children's future by preventing their excessive lobbying practices against the introduction of a Green New Deal.»

Both narratives are identical concerning the casting of fossil fuel companies as villains. By contrast, they differ regarding the motivation behind the villain characterization of fossil fuel companies, with narrative 1 ascribing them a crucial role in the intensification of climate change (substance), and narrative 2 claiming that they block an important reform against climate change (process).

Although the distinction between a policy's substance and the process seems clearly identifiable in policy narratives, so far, no NPF studies have controlled for this potentially important difference. This omission might be problematic because the NPF asserts that narratives are used to help achieve a policy outcome, but the framework remains largely silent on *how* narratives are used along the way to get there. Thus, central policy dynamics are left in the dark. First, impact dynamics are ignored: Ample research has shown that there are both instances where process impacts substance (Kingdon, 2014; Sabatier, 1987) and vice versa (Lowi, 1972; Soss & Schram, 2007). Such research is often subsumed under the catch phrase “Do politics influence policy or does policy influence politics?”. While our central argument alludes to this question, we prefer the substance/process categorization over policy/politics, as in our view, both substance and process are part of the policy domain (cf. section “[Distinguishing Between Policy Substance and Process](#)”). Second, deliberation dynamics are omitted as well: Policy narratives in a substance debate need claims regarding the effectiveness of a policy, whereas policy narratives in a process debate can rely on personal attacks among political actors that have nothing to do with the actual policy at stake. In short, the substance versus process distinction relates to the deliberative quality of a policy debate. Analyzing debates by means of the proposed distinction might provide us with insights concerning the occurrence of such dynamics.

Hence, this article aims to answer the following two research questions: What are the benefits, if any, in distinguishing between substance and process in policy narratives? What influences the prevalence of substance or process in policy narratives, respectively? We answer these two questions by conceptualizing substance and process as “policy dimension”—a new aspect of narrative content within the NPF, alongside beliefs and strategies. While *substance* policy narrative elements refer to a policy's implementation model, *process* narrative elements focus on power conflicts in a policy's life cycle. To demonstrate the empirical prevalence and usefulness of this analytical distinction, we conduct both quantitative and qualitative meso-level analyses on an exploratory case.

Examining narratives in a Swiss policy debate around the evaluation of an implemented policy, we find that both substance and process appear and that their separate analysis delivers distinctive insights concerning the policy debate at hand. While substance narrative elements tell stories about the policy's specific design, process narrative elements allow for insights concerning power dynamics at play in the policy's life cycle. Additionally, we find evidence that the distribution between substance and process elements is influenced by the type of debate venue.

The article is structured as follows. First, we conceptualize the distinction between policy substance and process. Second, we introduce the NPF and examine existing NPF studies, which is followed by a

section that integrates substance and process as the content aspect of the “policy dimension” into the NPF and generates propositions for the empirical analysis. Third, we present our research design by introducing the case as well as describing the data and methods. Fourth, we elaborate on the findings of our analysis, before discussing the study's implications.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN POLICY SUBSTANCE AND PROCESS

In the following, we elaborate on the theoretical distinction between policy substance and process.

Policy as substance

To conceptualize substance, we refer to the impact model of public policy, which is regularly applied in policy design and evaluation studies (Knoepfel et al., 2007; Pleger et al., 2018; Rossi et al., 1988; Sager et al., 2017). Although this model is a stylized depiction of a policy's substance, it constitutes a useful starting point for our discussion.

Public policy is a political program that has the goal of solving a societal problem (Howlett, 2009). To achieve this goal, an impact model must be conceived that defines various elements and establishes connections between them (cf. figure 1). These elements build the substance of a policy (or the policy design). They are as follows:

First, a policy defines the problem to be solved (Knoepfel et al., 2007, p. 60). Closely attached to the problem is the group of affected individuals, i.e., the ones who currently suffer from the problem. Once a policy has solved the problem, the affected population becomes the policy's beneficiaries (Pleger et al., 2018, p. 228).

Second, a policy makes assumptions concerning a problem's causes (Knoepfel et al., 2007, pp. 57–58). Similarly to the problem itself, the causes are usually associated with a group of individuals, i.e., the problem causers. A policy intends to change the problem causers' behavior to effectuate the problem's disappearance. Thus, the problem causers turn into the policy's target groups (Pleger et al., 2018, p. 228). The assumption—or assumptions—that specifies how and why the problem causes are responsible for the problem is called “causal hypothesis” (Rossi et al., 1988, p. 25).

Third, a policy specifies how the target groups' behavior is to be changed. To elicit behavior change, one or several policy instruments may be employed (Pleger et al., 2018, p. 228). A plethora of possibilities exists here, from hard measures to soft tools. To characterize instruments, policy analysts usually refer to Vedung's (1998) seminal typology of carrots (positive or negative incentives), sticks (regulations), and sermons (information). The instruments too are associated with a group of individuals, namely with the persons in charge of implementing them. Although we typically associate public administration with such a task, private actors may assume responsibility as well, for example, in the form of public-private partnerships (Knoepfel et al., 2007, pp. 48–53). The causal connection between an instrument and the problem's causes is established through the “intervention hypothesis” (Rossi et al., 1988, p. 26).

It is important to consider that in specific constellations, the reality may be more complex than suggested by the model, or the different groups mentioned above may overlap or even be identical. This is, for example, the case when an industry perceived as causing a problem is asked to regulate itself (target group and implementing group), or when a group of teenagers considered to be disturbing public tranquility causes the establishment of a youth center (target group and beneficiaries). Nevertheless, for policy analyses, the model still provides important guidelines and is therefore widely acknowledged.

While empirically a policy's impact model may often exist only implicitly (Knoepfel et al., 2007, p. 60), it is usually possible to extract its central components from laws, ordinances, and other policy documents (Sager et al., 2017, p. 48). As we shall see below, the components may also be identified in debates about a policy.

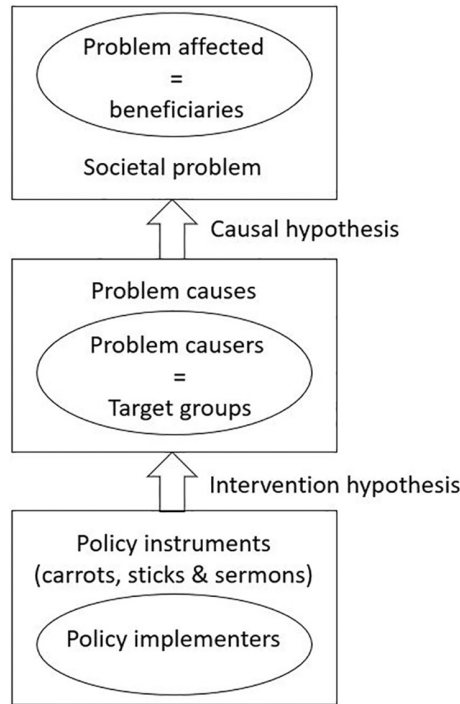


FIGURE 1 Impact model of a public policy.
Source: Based on Pleger, Lutz, and Sager (2018, p. 228), own adaptations

The impact model is not a depiction of empirical reality, but rather a conglomerate of theoretical assumptions about the working of said reality and the effects of an implemented policy. Accordingly, the impact model of a policy is not simply “given” but emerges from processes of political negotiation. To convince others of their position, individuals and groups may craft stories that incorporate elements of an impact model. For example, people living in remote areas suffer from a lack of public transport infrastructure and ask for a change in transport policy and a budget increase to adjust services; or a factory pollutes a river with wastewater and residents call for stricter policies in wastewater treatment and disposal. The first example narrative in the introduction of this article corresponds to such a substance-related story, with a narrator that identifies fossil fuel companies as the problem causers of climate change and future generations as the affected population. While the exact policy instrument remains unclear—problem causers might be prevented from doing something through carrots, sticks, or sermons, as well as through a combination of them—the goal of the proposed policy clearly is to stop the problem causers from performing a behavior perceived as problematic.

To summarize, narrative elements referring to a policy’s impact model belong to the substance category.

Policy as process

To conceptualize policy as a process, we refer to questions of who has—or does not have—the power to influence whether a policy is pushed forward, modified, blocked, terminated, etc. Policy process theories integrate this power question into their frameworks, e.g., when the Multiple Streams Framework describes the political stream, consisting of the current power balance in a society (Kingdon, 2014, pp. 145–64). They base themselves on a wide literature that debates the topic of power and shows different ways of

formal and informal influence on policy processes (Cairney, 2012, pp. 46–47). For example, Bachrach and Baratz (1962) famously argued that not only the capability of influencing a decision in a preferred direction is an exercise of power, but also the capability of influencing whether a topic makes it onto the decision agenda at all. Similarly, excluding individuals or groups from participating in a decision constitutes an exercise of power (Schattschneider, 1960). However, even when formally excluded, there may be ways to influence a decision—research on the effects of interest group politics (Richardson, 2000) or of social movement campaigns (Johannesson & Weinryb, 2021) testifies to this.

This dynamic component of a policy is captured by the popular heuristic of the policy cycle that illustrates the different stages policy traverses, from its agenda setting to legitimation, implementation, and eventually termination (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003; Lasswell, 1956). Within this process, multiple decisions occur that determine a policy's future path (Cairney, 2012, p. 17).

Questions of power and influence within a policy's process may also find their way into debates and hence be incorporated into stories. For example, a group that is excluded from a policy decision may scandalize this fact and accuse the ones with access; or a person that is part of a decision-making process may try to gather support for their preferred option by crafting a story that depicts everybody siding with them as a benefactor, savior, or the like. The second narrative displayed in the introduction of this article represents such a process-related story, with the fossil fuel companies being criticized for informally influencing the policy process via lobbying practices.

To sum up, narrative elements about power questions in a policy's life cycle are part of the process category. As becomes clear from this and the previous section, narratives referring to substance and process might appear similar at first glance, but they refer to fundamentally different aspects of public policy.

THE NPF AND THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN SUBSTANCE AND PROCESS

This section introduces the NPF and demonstrates that the distinction between policy substance and process is not yet clearly integrated into the framework. Furthermore, the section presents the substance versus process distinction as a novel concept in how the NPF conceives narrative content: the policy dimension. Finally, we articulate and explore three propositions related to the policy dimension using a Swiss case of child and adult protection policy.

Introduction of the NPF

The NPF is built on the basic assumption that narratives are the primary tool by which individuals cognitively organize, assess, and communicate information. Narratives are stories about a certain event that reveals the narrator's perception or interest by emphasizing some elements and pushing others into the background. The importance of narratives for human cognition has long been confirmed in neuroscience and narrative analyses have found their way into various academic literature such as communication (e.g., McComas & Shanahan, 1999), marketing (e.g., Mattila, 2000), and psychology (e.g., Gerrig & Egidi, 2003). Given the overall significance of narratives for human cognition, this concept has also been translated into political science (e.g., Patterson & Monroe, 1998) and especially into the analysis of policy processes (Jones & McBeth, 2010). The NPF conducts empirical examinations of narratives across different policy areas (Shanahan et al., 2011, 2017). To this end, the framework conceives narratives as having a fixed structure—a narrative's *form*—that comprises a setting, narrative characters such as heroes, villains, victims, plots, and morals (Shanahan et al., 2017, pp. 175–76). Furthermore, narratives are filled with *content*. To date, NPF scholars have specified beliefs and strategies as constituting a narrative's content (Shanahan et al., 2017, pp. 177–78).

According to the NPF, narratives are used strategically by actors to reach their goals. The NPF has put forward various hypotheses on strategies, such as the devil-angel shift, which have already been confirmed

or refined in the literature (cf. for instance Brewer, 2019; Shanahan et al., 2013; Shanahan et al., 2017). McBeth et al. (2016) show that involved actors are capable of deviating from preferred narratives when they see a strategic benefit in them. According to McMorris, Zanooco, and Jones (2018, p. 775), “narratives become a strategic tool for achieving political success and do not inherently need to represent the realities of the issue.” Shanahan et al. state that “individuals may simultaneously hold multiple different narratives internally” (Shanahan et al., 2018a, p. 922), “while externally communicated policy narratives are strategically constructed in simpler terms” (Shanahan et al., 2018a, p. 934).

Existing NPF research and the distinction between substance and process

A substantive screening of NPF's existing theory and empirical research¹ reveals that so far, the NPF does not systematically distinguish between policy substance and process. This observation may be illustrated by examples both from the NPF's theory and empirics.²

On a theoretical level, and with regard to the structural categories, the rather openly formulated definitions of the often-applied narrative *characters* “hero,” “villain,” and “victim” reveal that applications in both directions are conceivable: «there may be victims who are harmed, villains who do the harm, and heroes who provide or promise to provide relief from the harm and presume to solve the problem» (Shanahan et al., 2017, p. 176). For instance, Shanahan et al. (2018b, p. 343) mention both a substance and process version of the villain character by providing the following definition: «Those who create a harm, or inflicts damage or pain upon a victim [*substance*] or, in other cases as one who opposes the aims of the hero [*process*]».

Similarly, NPF scholars define a narrative's *moral* in a way that leaves leeway for both substance and process elements: «In a policy narrative, policy solutions are the moral or normative actions incarnate. The moral of the story gives purpose to the characters' actions and motives. As such, in the NPF, the moral of the story is often equivalent to the policy solution» (Shanahan et al., 2017, p. 176).

Turning to empirical applications of the NPF, we find both instances of clear substance—and process-related elements in existing research. Those elements often appear within one study and are treated “as equals”—i.e., without a conceptual distinction between substance and process. For example, when Shanahan et al. (2013, p. 467) list the morals of narratives used in a policy debate on wind energy, the first two relate to the project's location—i.e., substance—while the third refers to the project's legitimation—i.e., process: (1) The wind project should be installed off the Nantucket Coast; (2) the wind project should be installed at some other, unspecified location; (3) the wind project's approval process should be stopped.

In a similar vein, Merry (2016a) provides examples of narrative character depictions in tweets on a school shooting that relate both to substance and process. One tweet features a victim that may be categorized as substance since it is a problem-affected person suffering from the school shooting: “Truly heartbreaking to hear a 3rd-grader describe mass shooting @ her school.” (Merry, 2016a, p. 382). Another tweet depicts the President of the United States (POTUS) as a process hero who helps push a policy forward: “POTUS to support Dianne Feinstein's legislation on Assault Weapon Ban—great news—badge of courage” (Merry, 2016a, p. 382).

To conclude: Whereas both a policy's substance and process may be located in the NPF and its empirical applications, they have not been conceptually distinguished so far.

Policy dimension: A new concept to distinguish substance and process in policy narratives

We conceptualize substance and process as a new aspect of narrative content within the NPF. As mentioned in the section “[Introduction of the NPF](#)”, NPF scholars have characterized narrative content as consisting of beliefs and strategies. Our newly proposed aspect of narrative content, which we design-

nate here as “policy dimension,” specifies whether the policy lies at the heart of a narrative is referred to as substance, process, or both.

While we acknowledge that the usage of the policy dimension may follow strategic considerations, we argue that it should not be conceptualized as a narrative strategy. This is because narrative elements belong to the substance or process category³ independently of strategic considerations, as we show below. Furthermore, the policy dimension is distinct from policy beliefs. Although beliefs may be attributed to either substance or process—e.g., “sustainability” is rather a substance belief, “inclusivity” often refers to procedural matters—the policy dimension goes beyond beliefs by also comprising characters, morals, etc. (cf. below).

With the policy dimension's theoretical foundations outlined in the section “[Distinguishing Between Policy Substance and Process](#)”, here we turn directly to its manifestation within the framework. As a starting point, in this article, we focus on the narrative characters hero, villain, victim, and moral.⁴ Table 1 provides an overview of the policy dimension including examples. The standard conceptualizations from Shanahan et al. (2017) are listed as points of reference.

While with a narrative's moral, the adherence to either substance or process should be clear from the characteristics of the presented moral—is the moral a specific (mix of) policy instrument(s), or is it a solution to a problem in the policy's life cycle?—the categorization of characters requires additional information on the motivation of somebody's casting as hero, villain, or victim. As the example narratives with fossil fuel companies from this article's introduction show, the same character can be part of the substance or the process category, depending on the narrator's reasoning of why an individual or group is a narrative character in the first place.

Conceptualizing the policy dimension as an inherent part of the NPF allows to investigate a potential mix of substance and process elements that may be present in a single policy narrative. That such «simultaneity» of elements can indeed exist in narratives, and yet has not received separate attention from NPF researchers to date, is illustrated by an example Shanahan et al. (2018b, p. 335) make to explain the analysis of characters: «Global warming is a threat to our children's future [*substance villain and victims*]. Our cities and state governing bodies must pass policies that incentivize reductions in carbon emissions [*(potential) process heroes*]».

To guide our empirical examination toward answering the two research questions, we formulate three propositions. Concerning research question 1 (“What are the benefits, if any, in distinguishing between substance and process in policy narratives?”), we base ourselves on the theoretical explanations in the section “[Distinguishing Between Policy Substance and Process](#)” and the policy dimension's conceptualization within the NPF in Table 1:

PROPOSITION 1 *Categorizing narrative elements along the policy dimension, i.e. the distinction between substance and process, yields essentially different findings, which we assume as follows:*

1a: Substance narrative elements focus on a policy's design and the causal links it establishes to solve a societal problem.

1b: Process narrative elements help actors to fight for their positions of political power and assert actors' interests in the process of designing a policy and solving a societal problem.

Regarding research question 2 (“What influences the prevalence of substance or process, respectively?”), and since this is an exploratory study, we are looking for conditions in which the substance versus process distinction emerges as clearly as possible. Therefore, we focus on the questions “Where does this distinction emerge?” (different venues of a policy debate), and “Who uses this distinction?” (different actors involved in a policy debate).

The “where” question refers to the relevance of different venues of debate. Researchers applying the NPF have investigated debates in a multitude of venues, such as social media (Merry, 2016b), courts of justice (Smith-Walter, 2018), and parliament (Vogeler et al., 2021). First comparisons show that there exist fundamental differences between the characteristics of policy narratives, depending on the venue in

TABLE 1 The policy dimension in the NPF^a

Policy dimension				
	Standard NPF conceptualization	Substance	Process	Empirical locus of identification
Hero	«heroes [...] provide or promise to provide relief from [...] harm and presume to solve the problem» (Shanahan et al., 2017, p. 176)	<p>Conceptualization: Substance heroes provide or promise to provide relief from harm and presume to solve a societal problem</p> <p>Example: The government bans a pesticide from the market that endangers human health</p>	<p>Conceptualization: Process heroes provide or promise to provide relief from harm and presume to solve a problem occurring in a policy's life cycle</p> <p>Example: A member of parliament gathers sufficient support for a campaign for stronger rights for indigenous people</p>	Motivation behind the character casting
Villain	«villains [...] do [...] harm» (Shanahan et al., 2017, p. 176)	<p>Conceptualization: Substance villains do harm by causing a societal problem</p> <p>Example: A pesticide endangers human health</p>	<p>Conceptualization: Process villains do harm by causing a problem in a policy's life cycle</p> <p>Example: Companies that contribute to rainforest deforestation try to stop the campaign by using their extensive economic and lobbying power</p>	
Victim	«victims [...] are harmed» (Shanahan et al., 2017, p. 176)	<p>Conceptualization: Substance victims are harmed by the societal problem</p> <p>Example: People suffer from the use of a pesticide</p>	<p>Conceptualization: Process victims are harmed by a problem occurring in a policy's life cycle</p> <p>Example: Indigenous groups are excluded from decisions about the land of their ancestors</p>	
Moral	“the moral of the story is often equivalent to the policy solution” (Shanahan et al., 2017, p. 176)	<p>Conceptualization: The substance moral of the story is often equivalent to a policy instrument or instrument mix</p> <p>Example: A pesticide that endangers human health is banned from the market</p>	<p>Conceptualization: The process moral of the story is often equivalent to a solution to the problem in the policy's life cycle</p> <p>Example: A campaign for stronger rights of indigenous people is launched</p>	Characteristics of the presented moral

^aThe examples given in the table are hypothetical. For empirical examples from our dataset, cf. Online Appendix 1.

which they occur (Hildbrand et al., 2020). We assume that these differences also materialize in the appearance of substance- and process-related elements. This is because some venues—city executive meetings or legislative debates, for example—are directly relevant to a policy's process, with decisions taken immediately after a debate, and by the same actors as the ones previously involved in said debate. Thus, the process aspect of policy narratives might feature prominently in such venues. Other venues, by contrast, are more distanced from a policy's process, e.g., debates on Twitter or political broadcasts on mainstream media. In such a context, we expect the process category to be less relevant. We conduct the first test

of this proposition by comparing the parliamentary venue with the newspaper media venue, where the former is supposed to be “closer” to and thus more relevant for a policy's life cycle.

The “who” question addresses the status of different actor types regarding policymaking. Parties occupy a special position in political systems as they propose the candidates for democratic elections to the executive and the legislative. They serve as a link between society and the center of political power (Lawson, 1980; Poguntke, 2000; Sartori, 1976). Once elected, parties have additional possibilities to influence policy processes (Bernauer et al., 2015, pp. 285–86; McBeth & Shanahan, 2004). We expect this privileged position to materialize in the narratives that parties construct.

We propose the following:

PROPOSITION 2 *Depending on the venue, either substance or process narrative elements dominate. Process narrative elements feature more prominently in parliamentary debates than in newspaper media.*

PROPOSITION 3 *Depending on the narrator, either substance or process narrative elements dominate. Political parties use process narrative elements more prominently than other narrators.*

RESEARCH DESIGN

We choose an exploratory case for this first empirical examination of the policy dimension in the NPF, where a focusing event initiated debates among a multitude of individuals and groups in different venues. The chosen policy field—child and adult protection policy in Switzerland—has proven to be a rich case for narrative debates that are well amenable to NPF analyses (Hildbrand et al., 2020; Kuenzler, 2021, 2022; Kuenzler et al., 2022; Stauffer, 2022a, 2022b).⁵

In the following, we first present the case and subsequently provide information on our data sources and methods.

The case of the child and adult protection policy in the canton of Zurich

Our case is the Introductory Policy to the Law on Child and Adult Protection from the canton of Zurich,⁶ henceforth, called “Child and Adult Protection Policy” (CAPP). The superordinate national Law on Child and Adult Protection (LCAP) was introduced in 2013, with the goal of protecting vulnerable individuals such as children exposed to custody disputes, elderly persons affected by dementia, or children who are abused by their parents. It aims to provide tailored measures such as support of families through social workers, assignment of guardians with varying degrees of legal authority, or placement of individuals in caretaking institutions (Häfeli, 2013; Swiss Federal Council, 2006).

Whereas the LCAP's instruments were defined nationally, the form of its organizational implementation was determined sub-nationally; hence, the need for the CAPP in the canton of Zurich. The CAPP entered into force in 2013, prescribing the creation of professional, interdisciplinary Child and Adult Protection Agencies, the so-called CAPA. The CAPP effected the creation of 13 CAPA in the canton of Zurich that is responsible for 170 municipalities in total (Kanton Zürich Statistisches Amt, 2014; KESB Präsidienvereinigung, 2021).

The basic impact model underlying the CAPP can be summarized as follows: The problem-affected group consists of children, people with dementia, and other vulnerable persons. The problem causes often may be found in their environment, with family members, friends, or strangers negatively impacting the problem-affected persons' vulnerability, e.g., by taking advantage of them. The CAPA as implementers of the CAPP is to detect and resolve such problematic situations in favor of the problem affected.

Two years after the CAPP's introduction, a focusing event occurred in the form of an implementation scandal. On New Year's Day 2015, a young mother suffocated her two children of age three and five in a village near Zurich. The responsible CAPA had temporarily placed the children in a home due to fraud

investigations into the parents. The children had been allowed to spend the Christmas holidays with their mother but should have returned to the children's home until the end of the criminal investigation. The mother, who was diagnosed *ex post* with a psychosis, committed the double infanticide and tried to kill herself. During police interrogations, she would later claim that she had been motivated by the need to protect her children from the CAPA.

The double infanticide initiated the first evaluation phase for the CAPP. While the focusing event provoked many public debates about the specific case and the CAPA's tasks more generally, politicians started discussing whether the CAPP's design was flawed and should be revised. Some claimed that the infanticide might have been prevented if the CAPA had been reachable during the holidays.

All debates around the CAPP were situated in a context of enlarged political attention since the focusing event occurred 3 months before legislative and executive elections in the canton of Zurich.

Data sources

To examine substance and process narrative elements, we use data from the parliamentary and newspaper media debates. The period of investigation begins on January 3, 2015—when the first reports about the double infanticide appeared—and ends 2 months later, on March 12, 2015. The end was chosen inductively based on a quantitative analysis of newspaper articles (Kuenzler, 2021). By March 12, there was a change in issue salience. The public attention concerning the CAPP had subsided and other topics took precedence in media reporting.

Concerning the parliamentary venue, we downloaded all minutes of the cantonal parliament's weekly meetings during the period of investigation. To create our database, we used a full-text search to detect all agenda points that dealt with the CAPP. This search resulted in three relevant agenda points with a total of 34 statements from Members of Parliament (MPs).⁷ The first agenda point contains general reactions of all parties to the double infanticide, i.e., statements of concern, first interpretations of possible political implications, etc. The second and third agenda point both deal with a motion that asks the executive to examine possibilities of enhancing the CAPA's reachability during holidays. While this motion was first declared an urgent topic of discussion in parliament (agenda point 2), it was rejected eventually (agenda point 3).

Concerning the media venue, we collected all articles concerning the CAPP⁸ from the three daily newspapers with the highest circulation in the German-speaking part of Switzerland; i.e. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (quality newspaper generally assuming liberal positions), *Tagesanzeiger* (quality newspaper generally considered central-leftist), and *Blick* (tabloid). As both the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and the *Tagesanzeiger* are based in Zurich and feature extensive regional news sections, the regional anchorage was assured. While the tabloid *Blick* officially is a national newspaper, its main editorial team is situated in Zurich, and it often features reports from this region. The final database comprises 119 articles.

Both databases were coded manually by applying standard coding procedures of the NPF. We relied on thematic coding units (Krippendorff, 2003, pp. 107–9), tying narratives to specific speakers (the “narrators”) in a text. One MP statement or newspaper article could include more than one narrative.

Two words of caution are necessary concerning the narrator coding in the media venue. First, whereas the parliamentary minutes clearly attribute spoken text to their original speakers, in newspapers, it is journalists who decide whose narratives appear in their articles. This journalistic approach may create biases, an issue raised in previous NPF studies (e.g., Shanahan et al., 2008). For the Swiss media system, this approach constitutes a minor problem, since strong values such as fairness, true-to-fact reporting and a ban on discrimination are prevalent (Rhinow, 2017, p. 17). These values are implemented via a self-regulating system generally considered to be well-working (Blum & Prinzing, 2010, p. 525); a fact that has also been confirmed by several empirical examinations (Gerth et al., 2012; Hänggli, 2012).

Second, if journalists consider somebody's narrative to be particularly relevant, they may repeat it over time, although the narrator only expressed it once. While such repetition is not a problem when researchers are interested in the public presence of a specific narrative, regarding narrator counts, it may

create distortions. Therefore, in the media venue, it is necessary to interpret such counts with caution and to avoid overinterpretation.

Regarding the data's intercoder reliability, all parliamentary text was independently coded by two researchers. The newspaper articles were coded in the context of a bigger database that comprises 848 articles in total (Kuenzler & Stauffer, 2021). In contrast to the parliamentary venue, here the coding workload was divided, with subsequent intercoder reliability tests on a subset of 90 articles. Whereas the narrator and the villain codes displayed solid results (Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.855$ and $\alpha = 0.907$, respectively), the hero and victim codes did not reach an acceptable threshold ($\alpha < 0.667$). Hence, the researchers redid the entire analysis for these two codes together and discussed conflicts of opinion until an agreement was reached. For more information on the coding and intercoder reliability tests, cf. Online Appendix 2.

In a second step, the categories of narrative characters and morals were analyzed according to whether they refer to a policy's substance or process category. For this categorization, we relied on the specific text contexts that provided more information on why somebody was cast as a narrative character or on the type of moral, respectively.⁹ The codebook in Online Appendix 1 displays the applied code definitions and empirical examples. Intercoder agreement for the policy dimension reached a solid α value of 0.923 (cf. Online Appendix 2).

Propositions 1 and 2 are evaluated based on data from both the newspaper media and the parliamentary venue. The assessment of Proposition 3 is restricted to the newspaper media venue, as only there a direct comparison of the party and non-party narrators is possible (cf. Table 2).

Methods

To investigate our research questions and evaluate the three propositions, we apply inferential statistics as well as qualitative content analysis. The statistical part is composed of measures that characterize the narratives occurring within the debates of the parliamentary and the newspaper media venue. Furthermore, we applied Pearson's chi-square tests and Cramer's V calculations to detect systematic differences between venues and narrators. Fisher's exact test was used as an alternative when the number of observations was too low for Pearson's chi-square tests.

For the qualitative content analysis, we conducted in-depth investigations of narratives' contents to gauge further nuances of meaning related to the substance and process categories.

Table 2 provides an overview of the applied data and methods according to the three propositions.

FINDINGS

Following up, we present the findings of our analysis by assessing each proposition in turn.

Assessment of Proposition 1: Differences between the substance and process elements

The coding resulted in a total of 202 narratives, with 36 from the parliamentary venue and 166 from the newspaper media venue. Table 3 displays the breakdown of these narratives according to the narrative categories of "hero," "villain," "victim," and "moral," additionally providing an overview concerning the distribution of the coded elements within these categories along the policy dimension.

Both the substance and the process category feature a considerable amount of narrative elements—a first indication of the distinction's empirical relevance. While generally, the substance elements ($n = 192$; 69.31%) outweigh the process elements ($n = 85$; 30.69%), with process constituting roughly one fourth to one third of elements in most structural categories, the amount of process heroes ($n = 8$; 53.55%) slightly surmounts the amount of substance heroes ($n = 7$; 46.67%). Although this finding should be interpreted with caution due to the

TABLE 2 Overview of data and methods applied to assess Propositions 1 to 3

Proposition	Data		Methods	
	Newspaper articles	Parliamentary minutes	Chi-square tests & Cramer's <i>V</i>	Qualitative content analysis
1: Categorizing narrative elements along the policy dimension, i.e. the distinction between substance and process, yields essentially different findings	X	X		X
1a: Substance narrative elements focus on a policy's design and the causal links it establishes to solve a societal problem				
1b: Process narrative elements help actors to fight for their positions of political power and assert actors' interests in the process of designing a policy and solving a societal problem				
2: Depending on the venue, either substance or process narrative elements dominate. Process narrative elements feature more prominently in parliamentary debates than in newspaper media	X	X	X	
3: Depending on the narrator, either substance or process narrative elements dominate. Political parties use process narrative elements more prominently than other narrators	X		X	

TABLE 3 Distribution of narrative elements along the policy dimension

Narrative structural categories	Substance category, <i>n</i> (%)	Process category, <i>n</i> (%)	Total coded elements, <i>N</i>	Percentage difference
Hero	7 (46.67%)	8 (53.33%)	15 (100%)	-6.66
Villain	123 (70.69%)	51 (29.31%)	174 (100%)	+41.38
Victim	27 (71.05%)	11 (28.95%)	38 (100%)	+42.1
Moral	35 (70.00%)	15 (30.00%)	50 (100%)	+40.0
Total coded elements	192 (69.31%)	85 (30.69%)	277 (100%)	

overall small number of heroes in the dataset, it points to possible divergences regarding the narrative elements' occurrence along the policy dimension. The percentage differences illustrate this trend.

To assess whether the distinction between substance and process indeed is relevant for the NPF, it is necessary to delve into the qualitative findings concerning the two categories. In the following, we present key insights from closer examinations of both substance and process narrative elements.

The analysis of substance elements reveals two broad tendencies in the analyzed policy narratives. On the one hand, many narrative elements are aligned with the impact model of the CAPP, more specifically with the problem-affected group of children cast as victims and their familial environment as problem causers or villains, respectively. This cast is well-visible in the following quote, stemming from a debate about the double infanticide in the cantonal parliament:

If she has confessed to the crime, then the mother is guilty. The father of the children is probably also partly responsible, having neglected his family's livelihood and plunged the whole family into misery with his assumedly criminal activities. (Heinz Kyburz, Federal Democratic Union, Zurich Parliament, 12.01.2015)

Such narratives relate both to the double infanticide specifically and generic descriptions of problematic constellations among the CAPP's target groups. Strikingly, this kind of narrative barely features any

heroes or morals. The CAPP remains mostly unmentioned, so it is unclear whether narrators assume that their audiences know about the policy or whether they do not see the CAPP—or modifications thereof—as a solution to the problems they describe.

On the other hand, the qualitative examination shows that many narratives also criticized the CAPP with its implementing actors in the villain role. The following quote describing a famous writer's opinion about double infanticide serves as an example:

Jenny considers the CAPA to be thoughtless, highly dangerous, and incompetent. The 40-year-old writer is convinced that the children would still be alive had they not been separated from the mother. She demands the immediate disempowerment of the CAPA, since otherwise, more tragedies might occur. (Tagesanzeiger, 06.01.2015)

As is visible in this quote, many of these narratives feature a moral of the story. The featured morals range from specific reform proposals such as hiring lay people as CAPA employees¹⁰ to the CAPA's complete abandonment. It is also this kind of narrative that gathers most of the substance heroes, with supposed reform carriers such as the lay people dominating this category.

To sum up, policy narratives using substance elements on the CAPP either focus on the impact model of the policy with children as victims and the familial environment as a villain, or the implementing actors, i.e., the public agency CAPA, as villains.

Turning to the process category, the narratives do not display as clear-cut tendencies as in the substance category, with narratives often featuring only one process character at a time. Process heroes mostly consist of political parties that propose a solution to problems within the CAPP and are now gathering support, as this quote shows:

The CAPA's work can surely be optimized, yes, it has to be optimized. With a parliamentary initiative that we submitted this morning, we want to constructively help shaping this process. (Markus Späth, Social Democratic Party, Zurich Parliament, 12.01.2015)

Narratives with process villains predominantly cast political actors as using the double infanticide tragedy for their own purposes. These narratives refer both to the political right, accused of fueling citizens' negative feelings toward the CAPA to gain more votes in the upcoming election,¹¹ and to the political left, supposedly wanting to instrumentalize the case for previously existing expansion plans of the CAPA. For example, a conservative MP describes the initiators of the motion concerning the CAPA's reachability during the holidays as follows:

We think it is scandalous that the Green fraction is using the emotionality connected with the homicide to get their proceeding declared as urgent. [...] It is one-sidedly politically motivated if the Greens now use this tragic fatality to further expand the CAPA. (Heinz Kyburz, Federal Democratic Union, Zurich Parliament, 19.01.2015)

Process victims, by contrast, consist of the CAPP's implementing bodies, i.e., the CAPA. They are portrayed as suffering from a public debate that has spiraled out of control, with unfair accusations and personal threats uttered against them:

But to blame the children's death on the CAPA is cheap and unfair. Unfair, because according to everything known to the Tagesanzeiger so far, the CAPA did not violate their duty of care. Unfair, because the CAPA must not disclose any details of the case and must allow false representations to stand unchallenged. But also unfair because one forgets that the CAPA are in charge of thousands of cases, most of which proceed without major problems. (Tagesanzeiger, 06.01.2015)

However, as Table 3 shows, this type of narrative is relatively rare compared to villain depictions. Also, the process morals remain infrequent, mainly consisting of calls to parties to either support or reject a specific reform proposal in parliament.

To sum up, policy narratives using process elements on the CAPP do not display as clear-cut tendencies as policy narratives using substance elements. They often feature only one process character at a time. Process heroes and villains mostly consist of political parties. Process victims, by contrast, consist of the implementing agency, i.e., the CAPA.

Overall, the examination of Proposition 1 leads to its confirmation. The data show that both substance and process narrative elements occur in considerable amounts in policy narratives. Qualitatively, we can show that an NPF analysis conducted along the policy dimension yields essentially different findings concerning the policy debate at hand. While substance narrative elements deliver information related to the debate around the CAPP's specific design, process narrative elements allow for insights concerning power dynamics at play in the CAPP's life cycle. We consider both aspects to be of interest to NPF scholars.

Assessment of Proposition 2: The substance and process elements in different venues

Table 4 displays the results of chi-square tests and Cramer's V calculations concerning the prevalence of substance and process narrative elements in the parliamentary and newspaper media venue. In some instances, the number of observations was too low for the valid calculation of chi-square tests (e.g., substance or process heroes in newspaper media versus parliament, cf. Table 4). To still arrive at an assessment of such relationships, we rely on the results of Fisher's exact test.

Our dataset allowed for the conducting of three chi-square tests (for the villain category, the moral category, and the sum of all coded elements). The results for these three tests are significant at the 1% level and exhibit medium to big effect sizes, with Cramer's V ranging between 0.440 and 0.504. Thus, concerning the two narrative structural categories of villain and moral as well as the sum of all coded elements, we see a significantly higher occurrence of process elements in the parliamentary than in the newspaper media venue.¹² For the categories of hero and victim, the number of observations was too low for chi-square tests. However, the Fisher exact tests indicate a significant difference concerning substance and process victims in the newspaper and the parliamentary venue. As for the hero category, no systematic difference between venues could be detected.

Thus, Proposition 2 may be confirmed, although this conclusion is more tentative than Proposition 1. The conducted tests show that the process narrative elements outweigh the parliamentary venue, while the substance narrative elements dominate the newspaper media venue. This finding is a solid indicator for the assumption that the type of venue plays a role in the distribution of elements in a policy debate. As many central decisions concerning a policy's life cycle are taken in parliament, it is not surprising that procedural aspects are important in parliamentary debates.

Assessment of Proposition 3: The substance and process elements in narratives from political parties and other narrators

Table 5 displays the results of chi-square tests and Cramer's V calculations concerning the prevalence of substance and process elements in narratives from political parties and other narrators. As mentioned in the section "Data Sources", this part of the analysis is restricted to the newspaper media venue.

Here, only two of five chi-square tests reach statistical significance at the 1% level, with effect sizes again ranging between medium and big (Cramer's $V = 0.419$ and 0.510 , respectively). While political parties indeed use process villains more than other narrators, the sum of all narrative elements shows that both parties and other narrators exhibit significantly higher amounts of substance narrative elements. For

TABLE 4 Differences in occurrence of substance and process narrative elements between venues

	Newspaper media, <i>n</i> (%)	Parliament, <i>n</i> (%)	Chi-square (d.f. = 1)	<i>p</i> -value of Fisher's exact test	Cramer's <i>V</i>
Hero:					
Substance	5 (71.43%)	2 (25%)	–	0.132	0.464
Process	2 (28.57%)	6 (75%)			
Total <i>N</i>	7 (100%)	8 (100%)			
Villain:					
Substance	116 (79.45%)	7 (25%)	33.621***	0.000***	0.440
Process	30 (20.55%)	21 (75%)			
Total <i>N</i>	146 (100%)	28 (100%)			
Victim:					
Substance	24 (82.76%)	3 (33.33%)	–	0.009***	0.463
Process	5 (17.24%)	6 (66.67%)			
Total <i>N</i>	29 (100%)	9 (100%)			
Moral:					
Substance	26 (89.66%)	9 (42.86%)	12.702***	0.001***	0.504
Process	3 (10.34%)	12 (57.14%)			
Total <i>N</i>	29 (100%)	21(100%)			
All narrative elements:					
Substance	171 (81.04%)	21 (31.82%)	57.273***	0.000***	0.455
Process	40 (18.96%)	45 (68.18%)			
Total <i>N</i>	211 (100%)	66 (100%)			

Note: – = invalid calculation as expected frequencies are too low.

****p* < 0.01.

the narrative structural categories of hero, victim, and moral, the data sizes were too small to conduct chi-square tests. The Fisher exact tests that were executed instead do not reveal any significant differences. The trends here are not entirely consistent but overall, they also point to higher general usage of the substance than the process category. Thus, Proposition 3 must be declined.

DISCUSSION

In this article, we introduced a new dimension of narrative content to the NPF: The policy dimension differentiates between a policy's substance and a policy's process. The empirical analysis focused on examining the following research questions: What are the benefits, if any, in distinguishing between substance and process in policy narratives? What influences the prevalence of substance or process in policy narratives, respectively? Regarding the first research question, we show that both the substance and the process categories occur frequently in policy debates. Our findings reveal that a separate analysis allows to uncover fundamentally different aspects of a policy. In the case at hand, substance narrative elements focused on the debate around the CAPP's specific design, whereas process narrative elements allowed for insights concerning power dynamics at play in the CAPP's life cycle. Concerning the second research question, we confirm the role of debate venues in influencing the prevalence of substance or process in policy narratives but question the role of political parties. The findings show that process narrative elements outweigh the parliamentary venue, while substance narrative elements dominate the newspaper media venue. However, different narrators do not necessarily use different categories of the policy dimension.

TABLE 5 Differences in occurrence of substance and process elements between political parties and other narrators in the newspaper media venue

	Political parties, <i>n</i> (%)	Other narrators, <i>n</i> (%)	Chi-square (d.f. = 1)	<i>p</i> -value of Fisher's exact test	Cramer's <i>V</i>
Hero:					
Substance	4 (66.67%)	1 (100%)	–	1	0.258
Process	2 (33.33%)	0 (0%)			
Total <i>N</i>	6 (100%)	1 (100%)			
Villain:					
Substance	17 (44.74%)	99 (91.67%)	37.921***	0.000***	0.510
Process	21 (55.26%)	9 (8.33%)			
Total <i>N</i>	38 (100%)	108 (100%)			
Victim:					
Substance	1 (50%)	23 (85.19%)	–	0.320	0.236
Process	1 (50%)	4 (14.81%)			
Total <i>N</i>	2 (100%)	27 (100%)			
Moral:					
Substance	11 (78.57%)	15 (100%)	–	0.1	0.352
Process	3 (21.43%)	0 (0%)			
Total <i>N</i>	14 (100%)	15 (100%)			
All narrative elements:					
Substance	33 (55%)	138 (91.39%)	37.011***	0.000***	0.419
Process	27 (45%)	13 (8.61%)			
Total <i>N</i>	60 (100%)	151 (100%)			

Note. – = invalid calculation as expected frequencies are too low.

****p* < 0.01.

The analysis shows that both political parties and other narrators overall employ more substance than process narrative elements.

What do these findings mean for the NPF? We can think of at least four consequences: First, the policy dimension with its distinction of substance versus process allows NPF analyses to give equal weight to the examination of both sides of a policy. By capturing the key features of a policy debate, both in substance and in process, we can comprehensively analyze and interpret such debates. For instance, NPF studies can determine whether an actor's or coalition's communication strategy focuses mainly on a policy's substance (i.e., impact model), discussing assumed problem-affected persons as victims, problem causers as villains, and potential policy implementers as heroes; or whether it rather focuses on a procedural rivalry and power struggles with an opposing actor or coalition. In practical terms, a NPF analysis that gives equal weight to both categories of the policy dimension could help avoiding that a flaw in a policy's design is overlooked because the competition between political actors dominates the debate, pushing aside the substance aspects of the policy in an NPF analysis; or that a policy design is criticized and an evaluation or legislative change demanded, when in fact the critical debate is primarily dominated by political power struggles. The latter happened in the case at hand when the focusing event of infanticide occurred 3 months before legislative and executive elections in the canton of Zurich. The analysis shows that parties used the CAPP for their election campaigns. In particular, policy narratives with process villains were used by parties from left to right to accuse each other of misusing infanticide in their own favor. These accusations occurred despite an expert group's evaluation showing that the policy design as such was appropriate and achieved the defined policy goals (Schneebeli, 2015). Thus, such narratives did not contribute to a high-quality, substantial debate of the policy at stake but rather aimed at increasing

electoral chances and thereby spiraled the debate out of control, with accusations and personal attacks exchanged among political competitors.

Second, the analytically divided examination of the substance and process categories in policy narratives allows scholars to uncover mixed narratives; a narrative form we consider particularly exciting and promising in advancing the NPF. To date, we know little about why narrators use such mixed forms and with what effect. As we showed in the section “[Policy Dimension: A New Concept to Distinguish Substance and Process in Policy Narratives](#)”, mixed narrative examples already exist in the literature (Shanahan et al., 2018b, p. 335).

We can well imagine that especially in the case of strongly politicized policies more such mixes occur. In the case at hand, we consider two narratives particularly interesting. In the first, a right-wing People's Party politician is depicted as a process hero, while the CAPA features as a substance villain; in the second narrative, the CAPA is in the role of a substance hero and process victim at the same time:

Now he [*Pirmin Schwander, a right-wing People's Party politician*] wants to completely disempower the social authority [*the CAPA*], is considering a corresponding popular initiative. “I can no longer stand by. This is about people,” Schwander says of his motivation. He has studied hundreds of dossiers and found that the CAPA works more unprofessionally than the former guardianship authorities. (...) “Decisions are made far too quickly. The will of those affected must be taken into account again.” His advice: “Don't turn to the CAPA, look for alternatives first. Because once you're in their clutches, you can't get out.” (Blick, 06.01.2015)

The child and adult protection authorities have a demanding task to fulfill in our state. This task is indispensable for our society. (...) In an immensely difficult situation, also for the CAPA, these authorities therefore deserve first and foremost our solidarity and the greatest possible protection against wild attacks and malicious insinuations. (Markus Späth, Social Democratic Party, Zurich Parliament, 12.01.2015)

These narratives are illustrative examples of various aspects that may advance the NPF: They show how closely interlinked substance and process narrative elements are, and thus, how important it is to distinctively analyze them. In addition, it is conceivable that process narrative elements are not only used in times of higher politicization but also in other situations when narrators are not really able to present a valuable alternative in terms of substance/policy design. Instead, presenting (themselves as) process heroes is easier and still may lead to a positive effect in terms of the narrators' position in a power struggle and/or to boost electoral support.¹³ Finally, narrative example 2 illustrates how different stories are depending on whether narrators decide to use substance or process elements. Thus, the NPF indeed misses relevant aspects of a public policy debate if it does not distinguish between substance and process.

The question of whether process impacts substance or vice versa, i.e., referring to the catch phrase “Do politics influence policy or does policy influence politics?”, is a big one, which is not fully answered here. However, this explorative study brings the NPF closer to examining this question by refining the analytical capacity of the framework.

A third consequence for the NPF relates to the possibility of studying the overall deliberative quality of a policy debate by including the policy dimension in the analysis. The qualitative analysis of Proposition 1 showed that narratives dominated by substance elements generally exhibit higher narrativity, often with the presence of (at least) two structural categories, compared to narratives dominated by process elements, which mostly consist of only one process character. This difference refers to the consideration, uttered at the outset of this article, that an analytical distinction of NPF elements along the two categories reveals how differently debates function depending on whether they focus on substance or process. We argue that in the former case, narratives need to be more sophisticated to convince the audience in terms of substance, e.g., they need to go more into detail of a policy's functioning to make claims regarding the effectiveness of the policy (design); in the latter case, relying on personal attacks against a political opponent or depicting oneself as a hero in the process of adopting, rejecting or evaluating a policy may be

enough to position oneself in the power struggle of a policy's life cycle (and to gather electoral support). Although further research is needed, in tendency our findings illustrate this qualitative difference between policy substance and policy process.

Fourth, the findings related to Propositions 2 and 3 reveal a tendency toward generally higher use of the substance category than process. On the one hand, this tendency might be due to narrators strategically adapting their narratives according to the audience. In other words, it is conceivable that actors chose strategically between substance or process narrative elements, respectively, depending on the context of a debate and the recipients of their narratives. I.e., narrators are well able to switch between narratives used in a political power struggle scenario or a substantive debate about a policy's design. On the other hand, this finding might be a consequence of the data problem in the media venue, namely that journalists might repeat specific narratives when they consider them relevant, cf. section "Data Sources". Since that part of the analysis was conducted based on the newspaper media data only, this limited data might account for the dominance of substance narrative elements at hand. Either way, more data are needed to acquire more solid findings, for example, based on direct communication venues of narrators such as websites, newsletters, or social media posts.

CONCLUSION

This article conceptualized the "policy dimension", a new aspect of narrative content in the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). The policy dimension is composed of two categories: A policy's substance and a policy's process. Whereas existing NPF research often contains elements from both categories, they are not analytically separated. However, a distinction between substance and process narrative elements enables NPF scholars to refine their analysis and gain new insights into policy debates.

We examined the debates about a subnational policy's evaluation in Switzerland that were initiated through a focusing event in 2015. We found that both substance and process narrative elements influenced the debates. While substance narrative elements tell stories about the policy's specific design, process policy narratives allow for insights concerning power dynamics at play in the policy's life cycle. Additionally, we found evidence that the distribution between substance and process elements is influenced by the type of debate venue.

The distinction between substance and process elements provides the NPF with interesting new avenues of research. Depending on the research question, scholars might want to focus only on one of the two categories; or they might be interested in the specific distribution between the two and in emerging dynamics. The first avenue for future research consists of an enhanced conceptualization of the policy dimension and its role within the NPF. This article focused on its occurrence in the narrative character categories hero, villain, and victim, and in narrative morals. Evidently, the NPF features more components than just these four, so it is well possible that substance and process play a role in other areas too. For example, a narrative plot along the lines of Stone's "story of decline" (Stone, 2012, p. 160) could relate both to a societal problem that increasingly harms the problem-affected target group, or to a policy's life cycle that started with a promising proposal but got watered down due to strong competing interests in the political process. Similarly, further explorations of causes and effects concerning the policy dimension's occurrence in policy narratives might yield fascinating insights. Research could be expanded toward the influence of other venues or narrator types, but also toward the influence of different institutional and cultural contexts or situational factors, such as issue salience or the temporal proximity of elections. Scholars could also investigate potential differences in the substance or process narrative elements' occurrence depending on a policy's life cycle stage (e.g., before and after implementation). On the effect side, scholars could investigate the persuasiveness of narratives predominantly featuring substance or process elements, and how such combinations interact with other factors such as narrator and audience identity, issue context, etc.

For practitioners, the application of the NPF with the policy dimension constitutes an enhanced means for the systematic analysis of policy debates. It allows for the detection of interrelated design and

power dynamics that might block the way toward a prespecified goal. This detection, in turn, may serve as a starting point to develop alternative strategies and intervention possibilities.

The above-mentioned suggestions for future research also point to the limitations of the analysis at hand. This study's generalizability is restricted through its reliance on a single case exhibiting certain features, such as the policy field of child and adult protection, Switzerland's political culture and institutions, or the fact that the examined debates occurred 1 to 3 months before legislative and executive elections. These are all potentially important context factors that should be investigated in comparative case studies. Nonetheless, we are confident that despite these limitations, we could demonstrate the relevance and the potential of the distinction between substance and process for the NPF. We consider this study to be a stepping stone for further examinations that might enhance both the NPF and our understanding of the dynamics that structure policy debates.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The screening was conducted in July 2021 through Web of Science and Scopus, applying the search string “Narrative Policy Framework” to the source category of research articles (no restrictions on the date range). After two studies were eliminated from this selection due to lack of access (Apriliyanti et al., 2021; Wendler, 2022), a total of 110 studies was considered.
- ² As the scope of this exploratory study is limited, we focus on the following policy narratives' characters and morals. Obviously, future research should complement this analysis by addressing other structural categories, such as the setting or plot, or narrative content, such as the strategies scope of conflict, causal mechanisms, or the devil-angle shift.
- ³ Please note that in the following, we use the term “category” when referring to the theoretical construct (e.g. “the hero category” or “the substance category”). The term “element” is used to denote the empirical entities that are coded as belonging to a theoretical construct (e.g. “five hero elements”, “the majority of substance elements”).
- ⁴ For first suggestions on how to expand the policy dimension to other aspects of the NPF, cf. Discussion section.
- ⁵ Focusing on a restricted period of 2 months and a limited geographical area—the canton of Zurich [Switzerland is a federalist country, with the subnational states denoted as “cantons”]—allows us to control for a variety of context factors. While generally, drawing on the same empirical field for multiple analyses might bear risks, we consider it an advantage for the purpose at hand. As we want to explore a theoretical distinction that should be relevant for the NPF as a whole, the first investigation in a “familiar territory” with subsequent expansions into new areas permits the stepwise enhancement of complexity. Furthermore, the case definition differs from previous studies, with the empirical material featuring no (in the case of Hildbrand et al., 2020) or only partially overlaps with existing research (in the case of Kuenzler, 2021, 2022, Kuenzler et al., 2022, Stauffer, 2022a, 2022b). We elaborate on potential limits of generalizability and avenues for future expansions in Discussion and Conclusion sections.
- ⁶ “Einführungsgesetz zum Kindes- und Erwachsenenschutzrecht (EG KESR)” from June 25 2012, serial number 232.3, supplement number 78 in the body of laws of the Canton of Zurich.
- ⁷ Mean word count of statements = 290; standard deviation = 156.
- ⁸ The search of relevant articles was conducted by using a comprehensive search term within Factiva, a global news database. Cf. <https://www.dowjones.com/products/factiva/> - last accessed on 4 July 2019.
- ⁹ Please note that 9 coded elements were not clearly attributable to either substance or process, and 8 coded elements were ambiguous, containing both indicators for the substance and the process categories. Both non-attributable and ambiguous elements were excluded from the subsequent analysis. Example: “Our compassion goes out to everybody who is affected, not the least to

the affected families and to the CAPA employees. It is absolutely untenable that they need police protection due to threats and harassments” (Martin Farner, Liberal Democratic Party, Zurich Parliament, 12.01.2015; all dataset quotations translated from German by the authors). Affected families and CAPA employees were coded both as victims of the same narrative. While the affected families are attributable to substance, since they experienced the double infanticide, the CAPA employees are attributable to process, as they are suffering from the negative consequences of the societal debate that emerged from the infanticide.

- ¹⁰ Supporters of this reform proposal assume that lay people would be more sensitive toward the target groups' needs than professionals.
- ¹¹ In Switzerland, the political right—especially the Swiss People's Party—often displays a skeptic stance toward the state. This attitude is particularly valid for most types of social security policies.
- ¹² As the data from the newspaper media venue is composed of three different newspapers, we additionally conducted a test that focuses on the differences between these newspapers. While the actual distribution of substance and process elements varies, the substantial trend remains identical, with chi-square = 19.31*** and Cramer's V = 0.3025. Cf. Online Appendix 2.
- ¹³ For an examination of the instrumentalization of policy debates by political parties and other actors for their own interests and a discussion of its detrimental effects on public policy, cf. McBeth and Shanahan (2004).

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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