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STRENGTHENING AUSTRALIA'S REFORM 'MUSCLE' VIA SLO: EVIDENCE & PRACTICE

Australia & New Zealand School Of Government

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SUMMARY

This literature review represents the first phase of the research project. The project is the first of its kind to comprehensively investigate and apply a social licence framework as a means of building improved understanding and pinpointing opportunities and advice for strengthening policy reform. Social licence offers an established means of analysing key aspects of major, successful policy reform that are either rarely measured or taken-for-granted.

Our search process yielded 55 academic papers from across the world that describe policy reform both generically and in a variety of sectors ranging from social policy and health to transport, water and energy (see Appendix 1).

Specific application of the social licence to operate concept to public policy is rare. However, proxies for social licence such as acceptance and support for policy reform are common topics of interest. Likewise, components of social licence, particularly trust and legitimacy are commonly discussed and considered fundamental to reform success, but the relationships between these components remain poorly elucidated.

The review indicates a range of participatory processes and communications are commonly deployed by governments seeking policy acceptance and trust via input legitimacy. Likewise, a diversity of factors both within and outside government control are demonstrated to influence the success of reform and its acceptance. In particular, politicisation, leadership from the public service and fairness are important considerations for governments seeking policy acceptance. The make-up of communities, actions opposing the status quo or reform magnified by the media are important external factors influencing reform success. We summarise these findings in a conceptual model that underpins the case template that will be used in the next project phase.

BACKGROUND

This literature review is part of an ANZSOG Research Model Program project (2024-2025) aimed at addressing the need to quicken the pace, improve the capacity and expand the scope for major policy reform in Australia. The project explores evidence-based ways that we can strengthen Australia's 'reform muscle' to support the nation to effectively navigate and respond to critical issues, including climate change and entrenched disadvantage, and, in so doing, to improve public buy-in and trust in government. The project draws on the social licence to operate (SLO) concept to analyse public policymaking in Australia, especially major policy reform.

The research ultimately aims to deliver insights and advice on how the Australian public sector can build capacity and sustain SLO for major reforms. The project pursues two distinct, achievable and interconnected objectives to improve knowledge and practice to strengthen Australia's policy reform muscle:

•Generate improved understanding of how to build public sector capacity for major reform, drawing on contemporary cases developed specifically for this project.
• Inform the enhancement of the Australian public sector's social licence for major reform through distilling evidence-based lessons and practice.

This literature review represents the first research project phase. It distils key findings from contemporary, domestic and international literature concerning the elements of social licence present in effective, major policy reform. The review first introduces the broad concept of a social licence, prevalent across major industry since the late 1990s. It then details the literature review method, which involved identification of 850 academic papers, curation for relevance and in-depth, thematic qualitative analysis of 55 papers. The review highlights the key terminology, themes and 'proxies' for social licence that are influencing contemporary policy reform. In so doing, it generates a novel framework for understanding the intersection between social licence (and within that, public trust), policy reform efforts and reform success (or otherwise). The study is the first of its kind to comprehensively investigate and apply a social licence framework as a means of building improved understanding and pinpointing opportunities and advice for strengthening policy reform.

Origins of the social licence concept

Social licence to operate (SLO) is today a widely used and accepted term in government, business and non-profit sectors. SLO is defined as the level of acceptance of a policy or initiative within a defined community, for purposes of this study. Despite its growing ubiquity, however, SLO is often contested, haphazardly applied and rarely enforced. Yet the concept also has a strong analytical foundation. It is identifiable and assessable. When used in appropriate ways, SLO offers a reliable, replicable and fairly comprehensive means of understanding levels of public trust and acceptance of a particular policy or initiative. SLO scholarship has been used effectively to study public acceptance of major industries (Haines et al., 2022), to explore whether and how social licence 'moves' between similar policy issues or sectors (Lesser et al., 2023) and to identify and create indicators and measures of SLO for purposes of monitoring and performance improvement (Boutilier & Thomson, 2011).

SLO originated in the mining industry in 1997, when mining executives acknowledged the societal pressures impacting their operations and profitability (Cooney, 2017). Several important social and sustainability initiatives were also developing during this time, including corporate social responsibility, environment/social/governance (ESG) and 'creating shared value'. The resonance and popularity of SLO soon saw it extend to other impactful industries, including extractives (oil and gas), hazardous waste, transport, nuclear, renewable energy, major industry, large-scale agriculture and other major projects. Today, SLO is applied in a wide variety of contexts, at least in rhetoric, although the sophistication of its definition and application varies widely.

For Australian policymakers, SLO is a familiar term but also one which has not yet entered a more nuanced space of policy scholarship, strategy or reform and implementation. Scholarly literature that explicitly explores SLO for

policymaking or major reform in Australia or elsewhere, is rare, making this project unique in its efforts to identify, conceptualise and frame how SLO and its major components can strengthen policy reform processes.

The core factors comprising SLO in major industries outside of policy reform are assessable through social scientific indicators of social capital, developed and tested across numerous research projects in multiple industries since the early 2000s. The Thomson and Boutilier model (2011) is the original and most widely used of these assessment frameworks (see Figure 1), with other more recent frameworks offering more nuanced assessment opportunities.
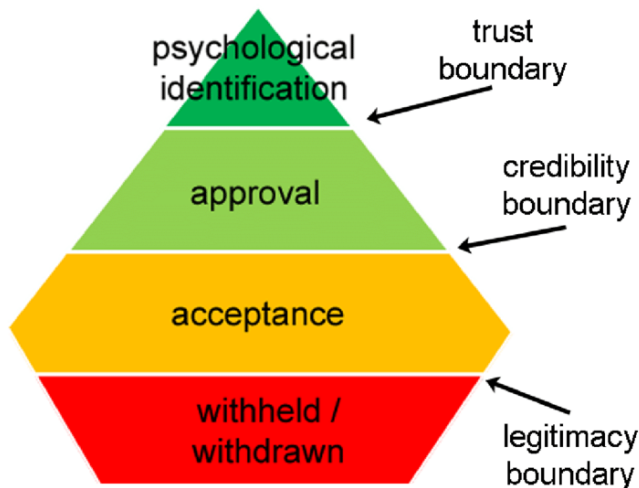

Figure 1: Boutilier and Thompson's original SLO Model, 2011.

Importantly SLO is generally driven by three interrelated factors, trust, legitimacy and credibility, through processes characterised by procedural fairness. Procedural fairness means that decision-making processes are experienced by stakeholders as open, accessible, transparent and fair (Moffat & Zhang, 2014). Decisions, projects or policies shaped by procedural fairness will result in stakeholders agreeing that actions taken were done so in an inclusive, respectful and equitable way, even when they disagree with the decision or outcome.

SLO and major policy reform: Joining two concepts

Developing and maintaining a SLO for major policy reform is both vital and challenging in contemporary Australia for a range of reasons. This includes the complexity of policy reform in Australia's three-tiered federal system and the challenges of operating in a policy context that demands sophisticated collaboration with multiple state and non-state, local and distal actors, including government, the private sector and civil society. Questions also exist around politicisation of major public reform decisions, declining public trust and public service capability. These concerns emerge after an era of New Public Management that led to 'hollowing out' of certain government functions and purposes.

When it comes to major policy reform, SLO provides an important and as-yet underutilised framework and suite of measurement tools for analysing the social and citizen engagement components that broader literature identifies as vital to successful policy reform. These factors commonly include, excellent stakeholder and citizen engagement to inform policy design and implementation; a focus on economic viability and policy sustainability; reliance on evidence over rhetoric; flexibility to adapt to complex and changing environments; bi-partisan support and cooperation or a sense that the issue at stake is above politics; and built-in mechanisms for performance measurement and evaluation, accountability, transparency and enforcement (Luetjens et al., 2019; Compton et al.,

2019). Social licence offers an established and helpful means of digging into certain of the key aspects of major, successful policy reform. Importantly, because of its focus on social factors that are either not often measured or taken-for-granted, SLO enriches current approaches to policy reform by equipping policymakers with improved means of identifying, articulating and assessing the more intangible aspects of their efforts. Our interest here, therefore, is to detail the key, underpinning concepts, themes and activities made visible through a focus on SLO in major policy reform. In so doing, we extend what we already know about policy reform efforts from the core/traditional literature to offer up a unique and helpful means of strengthening public policy reform.

Method

Our literature review focused on examining the role of social licence in policy reform, particularly acceptance and reform within its broader societal context. We conducted a search of peer-reviewed English-language academic literature in the international Scopus database between 2004 and 2024, using "policy reform" and "social licence" as well as associated concepts and drivers of social licence such as "trust," "legitimacy," and "credibility." The initial search utilised titles, abstracts and keywords, and also filtered to include earlier foundational publications (works cited over 100 times included). This yielded 850 academic papers. In the second search iteration we reduced the fields in which key words were located to the article title and author-defined keywords only. We also reduced the terms that needed to appear in these fields to "policy", then "govern," and then "regulate". This reduced the number of papers to 358. To refine the sample, we randomly selected 12 articles and assessed their relevance based on criteria such as their exploration of policy reform processes, public attitudes, and factors related to social licence, trust, or acceptance. Five of the 12 met the criteria. Applying these criteria to all 358 papers produced a final sample of 55 references.

We then conducted a detailed literature review, reading all 55 papers and employing a coding approach in NVivo that combined deductive parent nodes with inductive child nodes to capture thematic insights. Table 1 highlights the initial framework with parent nodes or Themes that reflect our research questions. Sub-themes represent concepts from the current literature on social licence and public policy combined with concepts emerging from an initial sample of five papers.

Overall, this process has deepened our understanding of key theoretical frameworks, models, and empirical findings related to social licence in the context of policy reform.

CURRENT APPLICATION OF SOCIAL LICENCE AND PROXIES TO POLICY REFORM

Direct use of the term Social Licence to Operate (SLO)

There is some direct application of the SLO concept to public policy, but concepts of trust, legitimacy and acceptance of reform are much more common in our literature sample

. One characterisation offered by Edwards et al. (2024) for SLO in policy is "*Discussions of social licence generally concur that it concerns social legitimacy and acceptance of policies and practices that lie outside predominant norms, and that it is founded on trust in agencies, transparent provision of information, and evidence of public good.*" Rather than having a "mandate" via the electoral process SLO is framed by one author as "governance via persuasion" (Murphy-Gregory, 2018) where governments and other policy actors need to continually make the case for reform.

Commonly used proxies and how they're applied

Given the origins of the particular concept of a "social licence" outlined above, our review explored how associated terms with similar meanings or known drivers of social licence like trust are applied in the public policy domain. The idea of citizens or interest groups **accepting** (or rejecting) the policy reform process was the most common framing for societal response (Table 1). A related term that was used by a number of authors was **support** for policy reform "*Where public support translates into active support for coalitions (e.g., joining a group) and/or taking other actions (e.g., threatening to vote against a government), it will have a much stronger impact on decision makers than passive support*" (Young et al., 2012). Acceptance encompasses several components. In terms of the policy cycle it may be acceptance that a problem exists vs acceptance of the proposed solution (Young et al., 2012). For example, "*the expected economic benefits mainly generate the acceptance of oil and gas activities in Greenland. However, the capacity of the government to secure and maximise these economic benefits, while at the same time effectively dealing with the environmental and social risks, is questioned by Greenlandic society*" (Smits et al., 2017). There can also be a cognitive versus a moral acceptance of reform, for example in the Gestel et al. (2020) paper exploring how the Dutch government aimed to expand responsibility for sick leave to non-state organisations "*HR managers thus accept the policy change at the cognitive level, but are not convinced of their moral responsibility*".

A key issue arising for any of the terms used is **who accepts** or grants a social licence? Commonly identified and discussed groups were various "publics" (e.g. the Australian public) and "communities" but also those who implement reform (e.g. irrigators with water reform) and various stakeholder groups from industry NGOs to unions. It is clear that not all groups or individuals will accept a given reform so who is prioritised?

Components of SLO: trust, legitimacy, credibility and procedural fairness

Many of the papers refer to declining levels of **trust** in government around the world and trust was one of the most commonly discussed components of SLO (Table 1). Trust in the system of government was often seen as critical for reform and the function of government e.g. "*Our findings provide evidence that lack of trust in government is a key obstacle to policy reform*" (Alkon & Urpelainen, 2018). Definitions of trust in the context of public policy vary somewhat depending on the analytical frame used by authors but two common elements or pre-conditions of trust were identified: 1/ **Integrity** or a moral dimension and 2/ **Competence** or an efficiency and capacity dimension. As defined by Houston and Harding (2013) "*trust refers to a willingness to rely on others to act on our behalf based on the belief that they possess the capacity to make effective decisions and take our interests into account*".

Table 1: Framework used to analyse the literature sample showing the frequency of papers covering each theme (total papers=55).

Theme	Sub-theme	# papers
1. Proxies for SLO in the public sector	**1.1 Public acceptance/rejection**	**24**
	1.2 Public consent	8
	1.3 Mandate	4
	1.5 Public satisfaction	4
2. SLO definitions		10
3. SLO components	3.1 Legitimacy	19
	3.1.1 Legitimacy of government	**17**
	3.1.2 Legitimacy of the policy reform	**18**
	3.1.3 Legitimacy of public servants	5
	3.2 Trust	9
	3.2.1 Trust of government	**17**
	3.2.2 Trust of the policy reform	4
	3.2.3 Trust of public servants	6
	3.3 Credibility	3
	3.3.1 Credibility of government	8
	3.3.2 Credibility of the policy reform	2
	3.3.3 Credibility of public servants	1
	3.4 Procedural fairness	0
	3.4.1 Procedural fairness of government	1
	3.4.2 Procedural fairness of the policy reform	0
	3.4.3 Procedural fairness of public servants	0
4. Operationalising SLO	**4.1 Participatory processes/ engagement**	**32**
	4.2 Partnerships	15
	4.3 Advisory entities	18
	4.4 Boundary-spanning	16
	4.5 Integration within the public service	12
	4.6 Legal	10
	4.7 Communications/media	**24**
5. Factors influencing SLO (internal)	**5.1 Capacity of public servants**	**24**
	5.2 Efficiency of systems within the public service	14
	5.3 Resource availability for the public service	7
	5.4 Political factors	**31**
	5.5 Transparency of processes	20
	5.6 Opportunities for participation	19
	5.7 Fairness, equity	**22**
6. Contextual/ outside drivers	6.1 Intrinsic nature of policy domain	13
	6.2 Historical factors	15
	6.3 Culture/country/region	18
	6.4 Crises	11
	6.5 System of government	13
	6.6 Mass and social media	**23**
	6.7 Features of the community	**34**
	6.8 Community action	**41**

A wide variety of **determinants of trust** were identified by authors. Government **transparency** which was often linked to information sharing and opportunities for citizen participation was commonly linked to trust (which relates to the integrity component). Likewise **efficient delivery of public services** is also linked to trust (reflecting the

competence component). An important caveat here is that "blind-trust" is dangerous. Without a degree of control and transparency in reform, citizens will be susceptible to manipulation and exploitation (Stupak et al., 2021). Trust is also **dynamic** "*There is no permanent state of 'trust': who is trusted, what is trusted, and what trust is about, is a continuously shifting scenario*" (Wales et al., 2006). There were also examples where policy options to engender public trust were not the most effective requiring trade-offs to be made (Cullen-Knox et al., 2017; Fuchs, 2010).

Trust in public servants specifically is not a highly researched area (Houston & Harding, 2013) and was not extensively discussed in our sample. The most obvious exception was in relation to **corruption or scandals** which resulted in a more individualised loss of trust (e.g. Kikuchi, 2008; Kim & Oh, 2008).

Legitimacy is possibly a more contested concept than trust (Sam & Tore Ronglan, 2018). In the public sector it can be broadly thought of as acceptance of the right to govern (Chen & Roberts, 2024; Marshall & Lobry De Bruyn, 2019). Trust and legitimacy are related concepts and were sometimes used interchangeably in the texts. Trust and legitimacy can be viewed as conceptually overlapping or as legitimacy as a precondition for granting trust (Stupak et al., 2021). In terms of the components of legitimacy, several authors refer to the seminal work of Scharpf (1999) who differentiated between **input and output legitimacy** "*where the former is associated with processes (e.g., electoral procedures and public consultation), and the latter is linked with performance, results and 'demonstrable' benefits*" (Sam & Tore Ronglan, 2018). Judgements of legitimacy can also be based on appearance, reputation and performance (Stupak et al., 2021).

The electoral process is one tier of policy legitimacy "*usually derived from public elections, representatives, popular consent, and so forth*" (VanWynsberghe et al., 2021). A common strategy for elected governments to retain legitimacy is connecting with and involving citizens in the policy-making process. For example, early and ongoing engagement to set agendas and track changing interests and values (Stupak et al., 2021), targeting those who will be impacted by the policy (e.g. patients and medical professionals in health policy reform). **Participatory processes** can be seen as particularly useful for building input legitimacy. Another commonly cited factor underpinning legitimacy was **effectiveness in policy implementation** and service delivery, particularly where this is demonstrably for the public good (Edwards et al., 2024). Some authors link effectiveness with performance management (e.g. Beeri et al., 2019) which addresses output legitimacy.

The term **credibility** was used much less frequently that trust and legitimacy (Table 1). It may be that it is subsumed by the competence element of trust. Likewise, the term **procedural fairness** was also all but absent in the sample, potentially replaced by language around democratic processes in the public sector context.

ACHIEVING A SOCIAL LICENCE FOR POLICY REFORM IN PRACTICE

Current evidence for how governments seek a social licence

We investigated seven potential mechanisms by which governments seek to build trust, legitimacy and a social licence for policy reform (Table 1, Theme 4). Four of these involve mechanisms by which government agencies and public servants interact with citizens and stakeholders (participatory processes, partnerships, advisory entities and boundary-spanning). Other mechanisms are structural or procedural changes within the public service ("Integration" and "legal" obligations) and various modes of one-way communication to the public.

The most commonly discussed mechanisms in the sample were **participatory processes** (Table 1 and sidebar) which aligns with the theory for how trust and legitimacy are built described above. Processes can vary according to who is invited. For example, in consideration of drug policy reform Askew and Bone (2019) note "*Many have argued that people who use drugs should indeed be integrated within these debates to increase policy legitimacy and outcomes*". This highlights that participatory processes are thought to increase input legitimacy and the integrity aspect of trust by involving those most impacted by reform in the policy cycle. There is also the expectation of improved outcomes which arise because key stakeholders accept reform but also because those with important first-hand experience of the policy landscape have been able to contribute that knowledge. Another consideration in participatory processes are democratic principles of **representativeness**. This may mean representation of key stakeholders but more broadly it can be enabling participation by a cross section of society or relevant parts of society (e.g. local communities).

Some of the **limitations** of participatory processes in achieving social licence for policy reform are power imbalances that restrict meaningful input from disadvantaged groups (Edwards et al., 2024; Schulz et al., 2018), lack of social cohesion and disengagement (Fuchs, 2010; Hendriks, 2009; Young et al., 2012) and processes that lack the power to implement change and so lack legitimacy (Salter & Jones, 2006).

The next most commonly identified mechanism to build SLO for policy reform was a broad range of **advisory entities** (Table 1). These can constitute a form of participation if people outside government participate, and the remit of the entity is to canvas a range of views. A variety of different terminology is used for these groups (see sidebar) and it's not always clear if this represents functional differences. Many of the entities described involve the elicitation of "expert" or "technical" advice or recommendations. These groups may function to inform policy development in novel domains e.g.   Cronshaw and Quentin Grafton (2016) described the establishment of the Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development by the Federal government to better understand the potential impacts of this new industry on water. The envisaged outcome is

Participatory processes

Consulting with key stakeholder groups to identify reform options
Public consultation (including eliciting submissions on draft documents)
E-government including various online forums
Public face-to face forums such as workshops and town hall meetings

Advisory entities

Expert/ Technical advisory groups
Advisory councils, committees
Taskforces
Working groups
Community committees, panels
Commissions/ Commissioners

evidence-informed policy. In terms of SLO it may be seen as a legitimate process (input and potentially output if policy delivers stated benefits), trust in the process and trust in the competence of those making decisions.

Various forms of **communication** were the next most commonly mentioned mechanism to build a social licence for policy reform (Table 1). Communication was explicitly linked by some authors to building **trust** e.g. *"The level of trust can be influenced by political communication in the form of mass media such as newspaper, television and radio"* (Kim & Oh, 2008). Communication is also undertaken to increase understanding of policy, justify and legitimise reform, and increase transparency e.g. *"they used the strategy of encouraging data collection/monitoring efforts and constructing a success narrative to give themselves leverage over the opposition and delegitimize their critics"* (Agartan, 2021). A wide variety of communication mechanisms were described with some of the most common being online platforms (as part of e-government), publications including issues papers, and media releases.

There was much less evidence of vertical and horizontal **integration** being adopted as mechanisms to build SLO. Most frequently mentioned were efforts at **performance management** to improve efficiency of service delivery (output legitimacy). **Policy communities** were also described in several papers although their link with SLO is less clear. Finally **legal instruments** relating to social licence were only mentioned by a handful of authors. Uffman-Kirsch et al. (2020) propose legalising rights to engage in policy reform processes, third party legal actions in an EU context were discussed by (Gunningham, 2020) and legal responsibilities related to human rights, particularly those of First Nations peoples were also identified (Kikuchi, 2008; MacPhail et al., 2023).

The key factors influencing social licence

We examined a suite of factors that may influence the social licence for policy reform. We split these broadly into two categories according to whether they related to actions of government/ public service or were contextual factors outside the direct influence of government. Below we discuss the most highly cited factors.

Factors relating to government and the public service

The most common factor influencing social licence for reform described in the sample was different forms of **politicisation** of decision-making (Table 1). This could be perceived or actual with, for example, lack of transparency in the policy cycle linked to loss of trust or input legitimacy. Acceptance was also threatened by vested interests and conflicts of interest related to those making decisions as well as issues with the electoral cycle. The latter being how community support or opposition can be given greater importance close to elections: *"policy makers are also more likely to initiate policy changes only when they need to avoid the risk of not being re-elected"* (Takao, 2019).

The **capacity and traits of public servants** were also linked to a social licence for reform (Table 1). It is clear that bureaucrats can play an important role in promoting or resisting policy reform (Cashman, 2017; Yuda, 2024). Some of the mechanisms described included working with MPs to foster support and working with key stakeholder groups to develop policy. Being consultative and responsive and acting with integrity were all noted as having positive links with trust and acceptance. **Leadership** was another important trait taking the form of championing for and gaining high level political support for reform e.g. *"we learned that the success of these types of environmental policies requires a champion to advocate for the policy benefits"* (Chen & Roberts, 2024). Alternatively poor actual or perceived capability is linked to loss of community trust. Inertia and closed networks can hinder reform and threaten input legitimacy *"The inertia of the civil service culture and its heavy reliance on an inner circle of policy networks can work against the formal policy intention of policy community reform"* (Salter & Jones, 2006).

Fairness and equity were the other major internal factors impacting social licence for reform (Table 1). Fairness is thought to be fundamental for reform and a social licence (Stupak et al., 2021) with people unfairly treated losing trust in government and reform. This was highlighted by the case of water policy in the US that disadvantaged

poor, Black communities "*After seeing Flint's and Detroit's crises unfold, Black communities nationwide increasingly distrust government and public drinking water systems particularly, as they identify with the majority-Black victims of Michigan's crises*" (David & Hughes, 2024).

The issue of fairness in policy reform raises an important issue for the social licence concept, namely **whose social licence are we seeking**? How are different values and agendas balanced? Fairness may also need to be balanced against efficiency e.g. "*the most efficient or effective transition path towards sustainability, may not be the most equitable or just*" (Hendriks, 2009). Democracies face the hurdle of policy domains where majority support hurts minorities "*if majority support suffices, this raises the challenge of how minority, marginalized, and dissenting views can be protected*" (Overduin & Moore, 2017). This links back to the moral or ethical aspect of trust and government accountability and capacity.

Contextual factors

All the contextual factors we identified that could influence the effectiveness of actions to build trust in government and achieve reform acceptance were present in our sample. Most frequently mentioned were various forms of community action, characteristics of communities and the role of mass and social media (Table 1).

The nature of the citizenry in a given jurisdiction as a factor in how policy reform processes play out had some overlap with other factors i.e. historical factors (that can shape attitudes and society) as well as culture/country region. A couple of papers including Newman et al. (2012) described different outcomes for the same reform occurring in different jurisdictions based in part on the **nature of their communities**. One important feature of communities is their socio-economic status. This can affect capacity to participate in reform processes, knowledge of individual rights, attitudes to particular reforms, etc. For example, "*Wealthy residents press for more accountability and have better tools to bring the actual standard of service closer to their expectations.*" (Beeri et al., 2019). A range of complex social factors also come into play such as social capital, people's associational life and general levels of trust e.g. "*In a strong society, the relationship between state and social actors is typically more cooperative, as both parties share a belief in their capacity to initiate policies or transform existing institutions*" (Fuchs, 2010). At a more fundamental level, demographics such as age can be critical for say interest in early education reform (Newman et al., 2012).

In general, **community action** indicates a lack of social licence for existing policy or proposed reforms. Community actions span a wide range of activities from protests and rallies to various forms of lobbying, advocacy and campaigning. Actions are primarily driven by extant policy settings either advantaging or disadvantaging individuals or groups. There were several examples of groups who benefited from the policy status quo taking action to prevent changes that might reduce their advantage (for example in monopoly situations). In either case, actions occur over and above democratic election processes e.g. "*These protest movements were sparked by environmental concerns, the feeling that the government did not pay attention to the stakeholders' point of view*" (Smits et al., 2017). While we have grouped these various activities as "community actions" they include open public events as well as actions run by particular (vested) interest groups, NGOs, various alliance of citizens or professionals in a policy domain, etc. For example: "*Our cases show that powerful advocates and advocacy coalitions played a strong role in the agenda-setting stage and in keeping up the momentum through the policy cycle*" (Hendriks et al., 2020). Some papers describe community action resulting directly in policy changes - not all of which were evidence-based "*ENGOs prosecute SLO campaigns primarily on the basis of narrative construction that draws heavily on beliefs and local perceptions rather than evidence-based policy inputs*" (Murphy-Gregory, 2018). Earlier in the policy cycles community action can also raise the profile of issues: "*Sometimes it is necessary to transform what is considered a "condition," or something one lives with, to a "problem" that one can and should do something about*" (Pralle, 2006).

Community action can be magnified or enacted through use of **mass and social media**. One common use of media by non-government actors is to change the narrative of an issue, e.g. "*A second strategy of issue redefinition*

was to focus on children's health. The antipesticides activists' arguments about the negative impact of lawn chemicals on children's health sparked a chord with the general public and were a key factor in gaining attention to the issue" (Pralle, 2006). Media can also be used to increase the profile or awareness of an issue, change attitudes and overcome government resistance to reform: "*The main 'trigger' commonly identified as having overcome this initial government opposition in each state was widespread media reportage of high-profile, multiple-fatality novice driver crashes, which ignited community demand for policy reform*" (Hinchcliff et al., 2011). A key issue here is bias in what is presented, what information is drawn upon and the tendency to exaggerate negative issues and focus on scandals.

The complex interplay of drivers of public acceptance of policy reform highlighted in this review of the literature has been condensed into a conceptual model (Figure 2). This provides a logical framework to highlight the key relationships between government actions, contextual factors and the acceptance or rejection of policy reform. We aim to revise this model based on the findings from case studies of policy reform that constitute the next phase of the project.
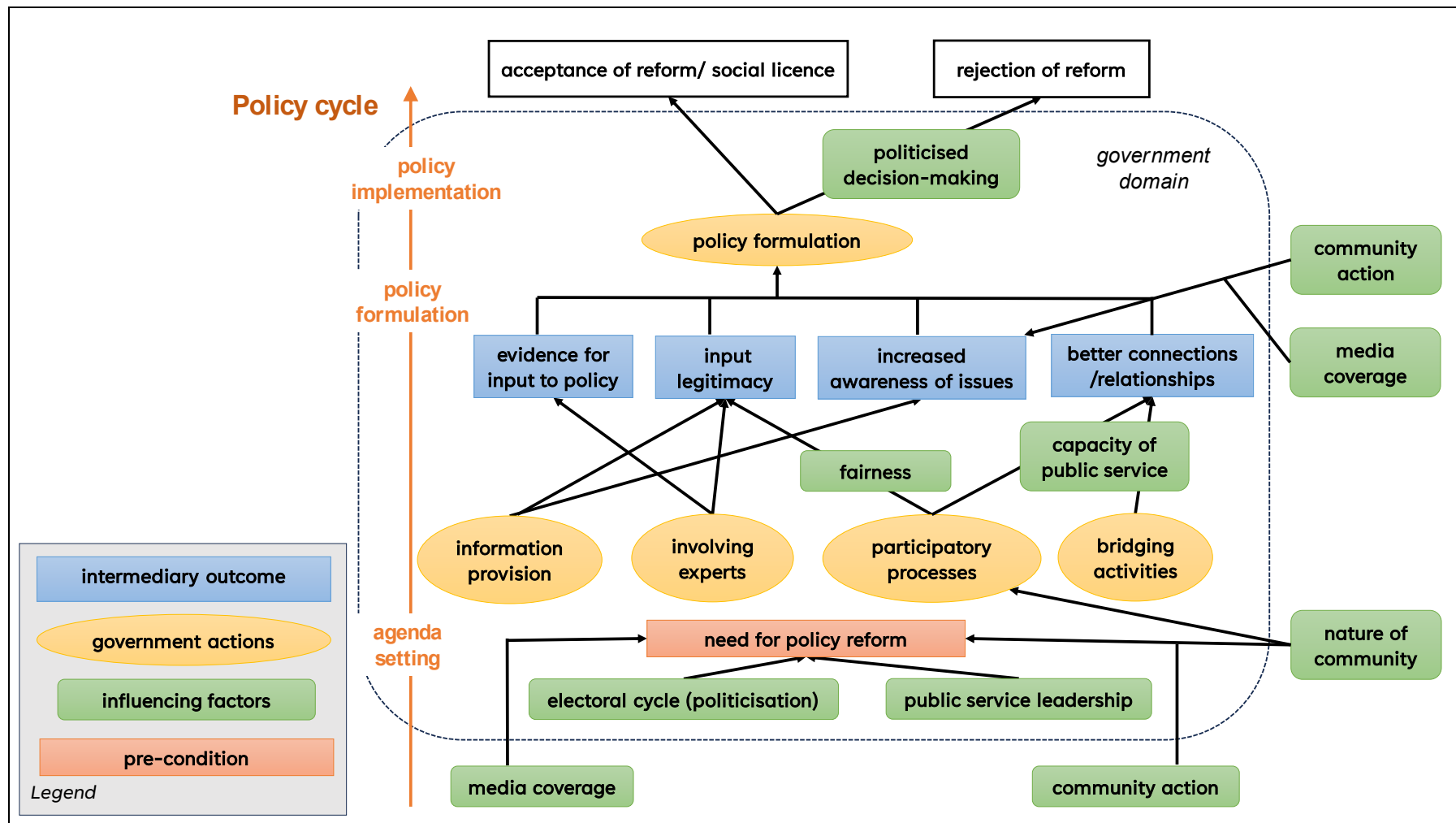
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Figure 2: Conceptual model of social licence for policy reform based on the literature review.

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APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE OF 55 PAPERS RELATED TO SOCIAL LICENCE FOR POLICY REFORM

(source: Scopus database)

Authors	Title	Year	Source title	Sector
Agartan T.I.	Politics of success stories in the path towards Universal Health Coverage: The case of Turkey	2021	Development Policy Review	health
Alkon M., Urpelainen J.	Trust in Government and Subsidy Reform: Evidence from a Survey of Indian Farmers	2018	Studies in Comparative International Development	energy
Askew R., Bone M.	Deconstructing prohibitionist ideology: A sociocognitive approach to understand opinions on UK drug policy and the law	2019	International Journal of Drug Policy	drugs
Attard M.	Reforming the urban public transport bus system in Malta: Approach and acceptance	2012	Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice	transport
Beeri I., Uster A., Vigoda-Gadot E.	Does Performance Management Relate to Good Governance? A Study of Its Relationship with Citizens' Satisfaction with and Trust in Israeli Local Government	2019	Public Performance and Management Review	general
Boutilier R.G.	Narratives and networks model of the social licence	2020	Resources Policy	general
Butcher J.R.	"Social licence to operate" and the human services: A pathway to smarter commissioning?	2019	Australian Journal of Public Administration	general
Cashman A.	Why isn't IWRM working in the caribbean?	2017	Water Policy	water
Chen J.C., Roberts R.W.	How does the dominant stakeholder strategically manage an innovative public policy? Evidence from the London congestion charge	2024	Financial Accountability and Management	transport
Cronshaw I., Quentin Grafton R.	A tale of two states: Development and regulation of coal bed methane extraction in Queensland and New South Wales, Australia	2016	Resources Policy	energy
Cullen-Knox C., Haward M., Jabour J., Ogier E., Tracey S.R.	The social licence to operate and its role in marine governance: Insights from Australia	2017	Marine Policy	environment
David O., Hughes S.	Ten Years Later: How Water Crises in Flint and Detroit Transformed the Politics of U.S. Water Policy	2024	Forum (Germany)	water
Edwards R., Gillies V., Vannier-	The moral, the political and social licence in digitally-driven family policy and intervention: Parents	2024	Social Policy and Administration	social

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Authors	Title	Year	Source title	Sector
Ducasse H., Gorin S.	negotiating experiential knowledge and 'other' families			
Feldhoff T.	Japan's electoral geography and agricultural policy making: The rural vote and prevailing issues of proportional misrepresentation	2017	Journal of Rural Studies	agriculture
Fuchs F.	Historical legacies, institutional change, and policy leadership: The case of Alexandre Millerand and the French factory inspectorate	2010	Theory and Society	social
Gestel N., Waldorff S.B., Denis J.-L.	(Mis)taking social responsibility? Implementing welfare state reform by private and non-profit organizations	2020	Public Management Review	social
Gómez E.J.	What Reverses Decentralization? Failed Policy Implementation, Civic Supporters, or Central Bureaucrats' Expertise? The Case of Brazil's AIDS Program	2014	Administration and Society	health
Greenfield D., Hinchcliff R., Banks M., Mumford V., Hogden A., Debono D., Pawsey M., Westbrook J., Braithwaite J.	Analysing 'big picture' policy reform mechanisms: The Australian health service safety and quality accreditation scheme	2015	Health Expectations	health
Gunningham N.	A quiet revolution: Central banks, financial regulators, and climate finance	2020	Sustainability (Switzerland)	finance
Hendriks C.M.	Policy design without democracy? Making democratic sense of transition management	2009	Policy Sciences	energy
Hendriks S.L., Babu S.C., Haggblade S., Mkandawire E.	What drives policy reform? A cross-country review of micronutrient policy change in Malawi, South Africa, and Zambia	2020	CABI Reviews: Perspectives in Agriculture, Veterinary Science, Nutrition and Natural Resources	health
Hinchcliff R., Poulos R., Ivers R.Q., Senserrick T.	Understanding novice driver policy agenda setting	2011	Public Health	health
Houston D.J., Harding L.H.	Public Trust in Government Administrators: Explaining Citizen Perceptions of Trustworthiness and Competence	2013	Public Integrity	general
Kikuchi M.	Assessing government efforts to (Re)build trust in government: challenges and lessons learned from Japanese experiences	2008	Research in Public Policy Analysis and Management	general

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Authors	Title	Year	Source title	Sector
Kim B.-S., Oh S.-Y.	Trust and government reform: A case study of the national tex service	2008	International Review of Public Administration	finance
Knook J., Eastwood C., Pinxterhuis I.	Understanding mechanisms that agricultural producers apply in response to evolving social pressures	2022	Journal of Rural Studies	agriculture
Levesque M., Klohn M.	A multiple streams approach to understanding the issues and challenges of lyme disease management in Canada's maritime provinces	2019	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	health
Lin L.-T., Yeh C.-F., Chen S.C.Y., Huang C.-C.	Role of governance in the achievement of 20-fold increase in bus ridership – A case study of Taichung City	2017	Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice	transport
MacPhail F., Lindahl K.B., Bowles P.	Why do Mines Fail to Obtain a Social License to Operate?: Insights from the Proposed Kallak Iron Mine (Sweden) and the Prosperity/New Prosperity Gold–Copper Mine (Canada)	2023	Environmental Management	mining
Marshall G.R., Lobry De Bruyn L.A.	A role for legitimacy metrics in advancing and sustaining environmental water reforms?	2019	Australian Journal of Water Resources	water
Murphy-Gregory H.	Governance via persuasion: environmental NGOs and the social licence to operate	2018	Environmental Politics	environment
Newman A., Deschenes S., Hopkins K.	From Agitating in the Streets to Implementing in the Suites: Understanding Education Policy Reforms Initiated by Local Advocates	2012	Educational Policy	education
Overduin N., Moore M.-L.	Social license to operate: Not a proxy for accountability in water governance	2017	Geoforum	water
Owens K.	Coal seam gas regulation in new south wales: Drawing the connections between risk, communication and trust	2019	Environmental and Planning Law Journal	energy
Pedro A., Ayuk E.T., Bodouroglou C., Milligan B., Ekins P., Oberle B.	Towards a sustainable development licence to operate for the extractive sector	2017	Mineral Economics	mining
Pralle S.	The "mouse that roared": Agenda setting in Canadian pesticides politics	2006	Policy Studies Journal	environment
Rae I., Brown P.	Managing the intractable: Communicative structures for management of	2009	Journal of Environmental Management	waste

Authors	Title	Year	Source title	Sector
	hexachlorobenzene and other scheduled wastes			
Salter B., Jones M.	Change in the policy community of human genetics: A pragmatic approach to open governance	2006	Policy and Politics	biotechnology
Sam M.P., Tore Ronglan L.	Building sport policy's legitimacy in Norway and New Zealand	2018	International Review for the Sociology of Sport	sport
Saxonberg S.	The Indirect Future Influence of the EU on Post-communist Family Policy	2015	Social Policy and Administration	social
Schulz T., Lieberherr E., Zabel A.	Network governance in national Swiss forest policy: Balancing effectiveness and legitimacy	2018	Forest Policy and Economics	forestry
Smits C.C.A., van Leeuwen J., van Tatenhove J.P.M.	Oil and gas development in Greenland: A social license to operate, trust and legitimacy in environmental governance	2017	Resources Policy	energy
Stephenson E., Shaw K.	A dilemma of abundance: Governance challenges of reconciling shale gas development and climate change mitigation	2013	Sustainability (Switzerland)	energy
Stupak I., Mansoor M., Smith C.T.	Conceptual framework for increasing legitimacy and trust of sustainability governance	2021	Energy, Sustainability and Society	energy
Sullings N.	#LetThemStay: Evaluating communications factors that contributed to asylum policy reform in Australia	2022	Refugee Externalisation Policies: Responsibility, Legitimacy and Accountability	asylum
Takao Y.	Japan's agenda setting to lower the voting age from 20 to 18: Prioritizing constitutional revision over democratic legitimacy	2019	Pacific Affairs	social
Tannenbaum M., Shohamy E., Inbar-Lourie O.	Advocacy strategies for a new multilingual educational policy in Israel	2022	Language Policy	education
Uffman-Kirsch L.B., Richardson B.J., van Putten E.I.	A New Paradigm for Social License as a Path to Marine Sustainability	2020	Frontiers in Marine Science	environment
VanWynsberghe R., Derom I., Pentifallo Gadd C.	Legacy and sustainability in the Olympic Movement's new norm era: when reforms are not enough	2021	International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics	sport
Vince J., Haward M.	Hybrid governance of aquaculture: Opportunities and challenges	2017	Journal of Environmental Management	aquaculture

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Authors	Title	Year	Source title	Sector
Wales C., Harvey M., Warde A.	Recuperating from BSE: The shifting UK institutional basis for trust in food	2006	Appetite	food
Weir S.	The evolution of taxi policy in Ireland	2011	Journal of Public Affairs	transport
White L.A., Davidson A., Millar H., Pandy M., Yi J.	Policy logics, framing strategies, and policy change: lessons from universal pre-k policy debates in California and Florida	2015	Policy Sciences	social
Young D., Borland R., Coghill K.	Changing the Tobacco Use Management System: Blending Systems Thinking with Actor-Network Theory	2012	Review of Policy Research	drugs
Yuda T.K.	The Politics of Path-Creation: Theory-Building of Social Policy Reform in Post-Economic Crisis Indonesia	2024	Political Studies Review	health