



Social Workers' Routes to Furthering Social Justice

IDIT WEISS-GAL AND JOHN GAL

Social Work as a Policy Change Profession

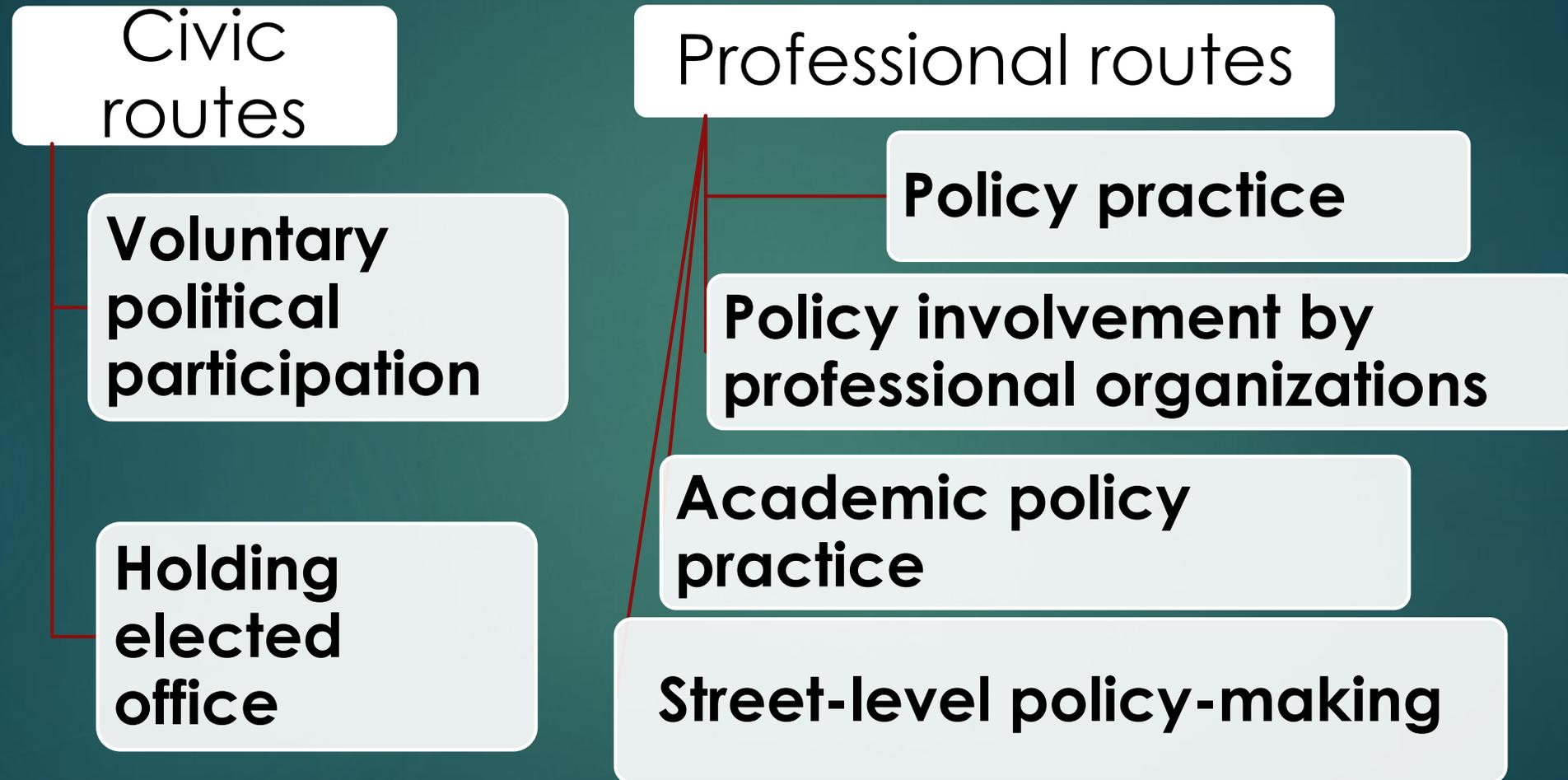
- ▶ IASSW & IFSW- Social work promotes “**social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people**”
- ▶ UK: Social work interventions “include agency administration, community organisation and **engaging in social and political action to impact social policy and economic development**”
- ▶ USA: “**social workers pursue social change**, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people”
- ▶ Italy: “A social worker must take on an **active role in the promotion, development and advancement of all integrated social policies** aimed at fostering social and civic advancement, emancipation and responsibility within the community and minority groups..”

The Public Policy - Social Workers Nexus

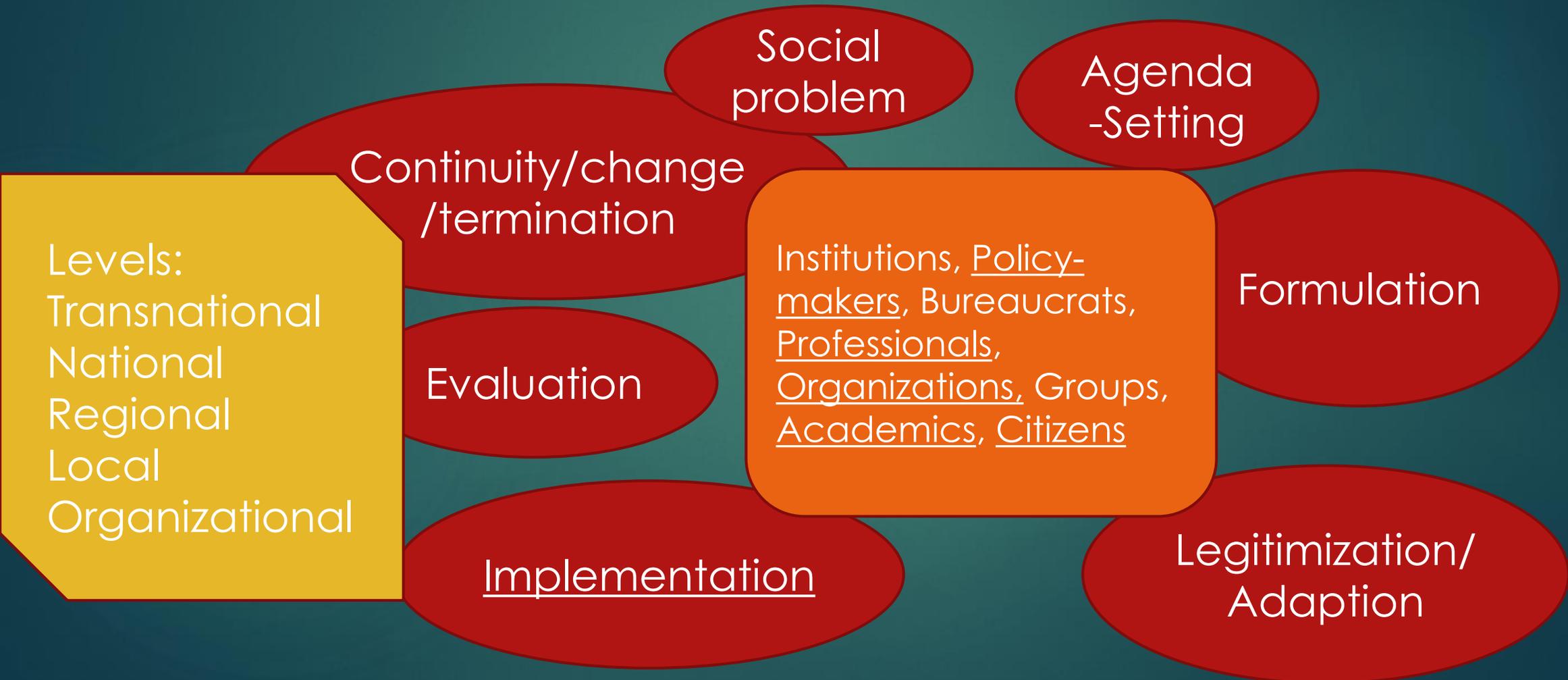
3



Routes for Social Worker Policy Actors



The Complicated Policy Formulation Process



Street-level policy involvement

6

- ▶ Social workers' policy construction through their actions and decisions as street-level managers and practitioners, who implement public policies
 - Social workers produce policy on the ground at the point of service by affecting the actual contents of public policy

Tzadiki, T., & Weiss-Gal, I. (2021). Team managers in local social services in Israel as bottom-up social policy-makers. *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*, 43 (4), 324-345.

Social work managers as street-level policy makers

- 18 social worker managers of local social services impacted emergency material assistance policy through implementation
- They redesigned virtually all the aspects of the policy: Who gets what, how, and under which conditions
- This created diverse de-facto policies on the ground

Policy practice

- ▶ “efforts to change policies in legislative, agency, and community settings, whether by establishing new policies, improving existing ones or defeating the policy initiatives of other people” (Jansson, 2008, p. 14), which are undertaken by social workers as an integral part of their professional activity with the aim of contributing to the wellbeing of service users (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2013)
- ▶ social workers engaging in policy practice do so in their work setting. They do not play a voluntary political role but undertake policy-related activities as professional employees

Gal, J., & Weiss-Gal, I. (Eds.). (2013). *Social workers affecting social policy: An international perspective on policy practice*. Bristol: Policy Press.

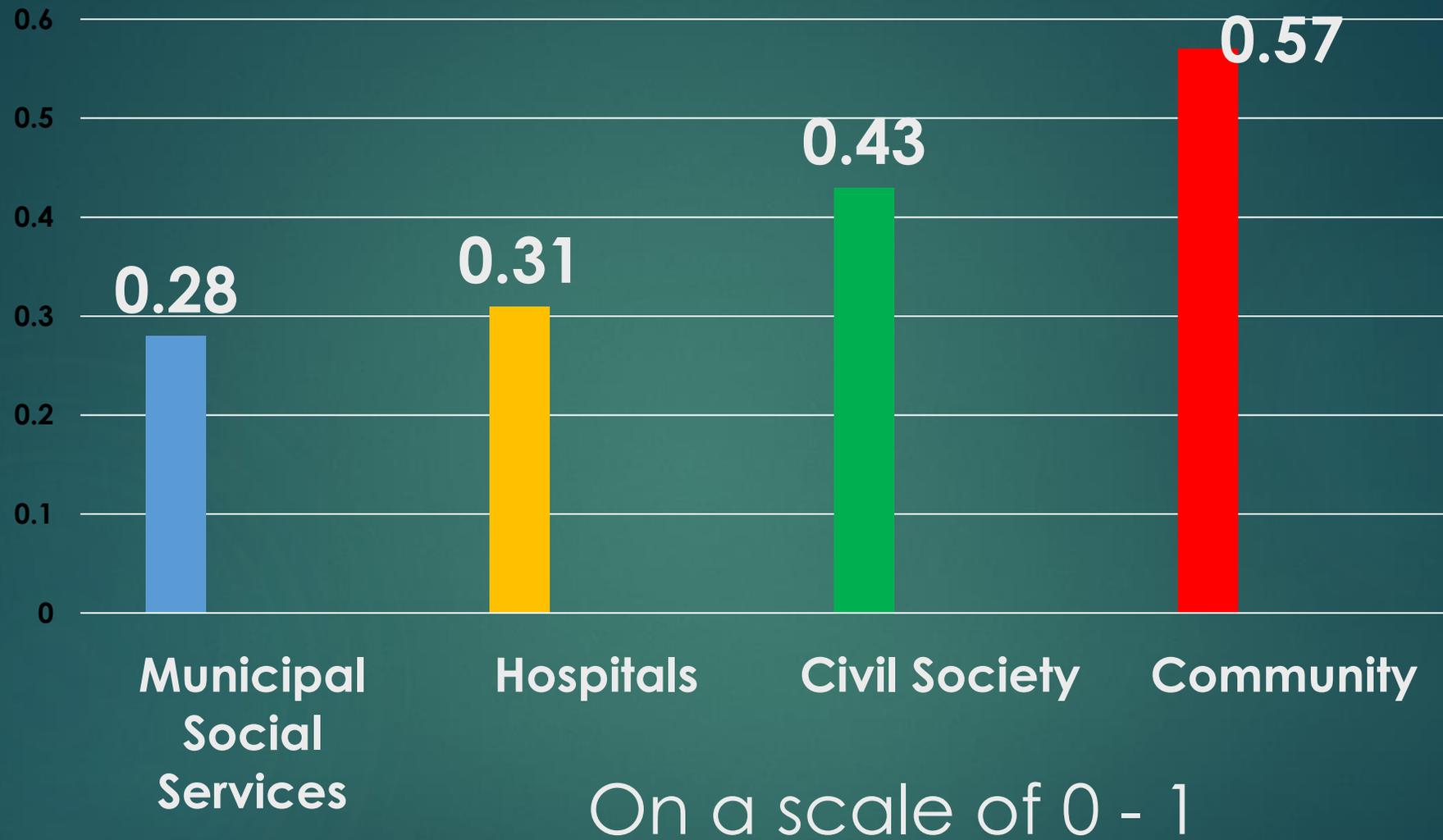
Case studies of social workers' policy practice in local government

- Incorporating social considerations in urban renewal processes
- Making local events and playgrounds accessible to people with disabilities
- Establishing social services for asylum seekers and foreign workers

Aviv, I., Gal, J. & Weiss-Gal, I. (In press). Social workers as street-level policy entrepreneurs. *Public Administration*.

Policy practice in Israel

10



Weiss-Gal, I., Gal, J., Schwartz-Tayri, T., Gewirtz-Meydan, A. & Sommerfeld, D. (2020). Social workers' policy practice in Israel: Internal, indirect, informal and role contingent. *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(2), 203-214.

Policy involvement by and through professional organizations

- ▶ Social workers` policy involvement through their professional organizations, which can serve as proxies or recruitment networks
- ▶ In policy involvement **by proxy**, social workers do not engage in policy processes directly, but are involved indirectly through the policy engagement of the professional organizations that represent them
- ▶ When the organizations act as **recruitment networks**, they encourage/urge and organize social workers to engage more directly in policy activities

Involvement through professional social work organizations

- ▶ Examining the policy engagement of social work professional organizations in Spain and Italy during austerity and their impact on the policy practice of social workers
- ▶ Emphasis on recruitment and 'social justice first' in Spain and on 'by proxy' and 'profession first' in Italy

Academic policy practice

13

- ▶ Refers to the involvement of social work faculty and students in policy-related activities through individual policy interventions, collaborative university- academia efforts and didactic activities

Gal, J., & Weiss-Gal, I. (Eds.). (2017). *Where academia and policy meet: A cross-national perspective on the involvement of social work academic in social policy*. Bristol, England: Policy Press.

Level of engagement in policy by social work academics

14

	M (SD)		M (SD)
Australia	2.29 (0.58)	Finland	2.05 (0.57)
UK	2.28 (0.59)	Israel	2.01 (0.62)
Spain	2.28 (0.75)	Portugal	1.91 (0.58)
Puerto Rico	2.27 (0.68)	South Africa	1.73 (0.59)
US	2.24 (0.62)	Sweden	1.68 (0.49)
Germany	2.12 (0.59)	China	1.49 (0.44)

1=never, 2=once, 3=a few time 4=frequently

Gal, J. & Weiss-Gal, I. (eds.) (2017). *Where academia and policy meet.*

Holding elected office

- ▶ By holding an elected office, whether at the local, cantonal, or federal level, social workers become formal policy actors and influence the policy formulation process from within

Lane, S. R. & Humphreys, N. A (2011). Social workers in politics: A national survey of social work candidates and elected officials. *Journal of Policy Practice*, 10(3), 225–244.

McLaughlin, A. M., Rothery, M. and Kuiken, J. (2019). Pathways to political engagement: Interviews with social workers in elected office. *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue canadienne de service social*, 36 (1), 25–44.

Voluntary political participation

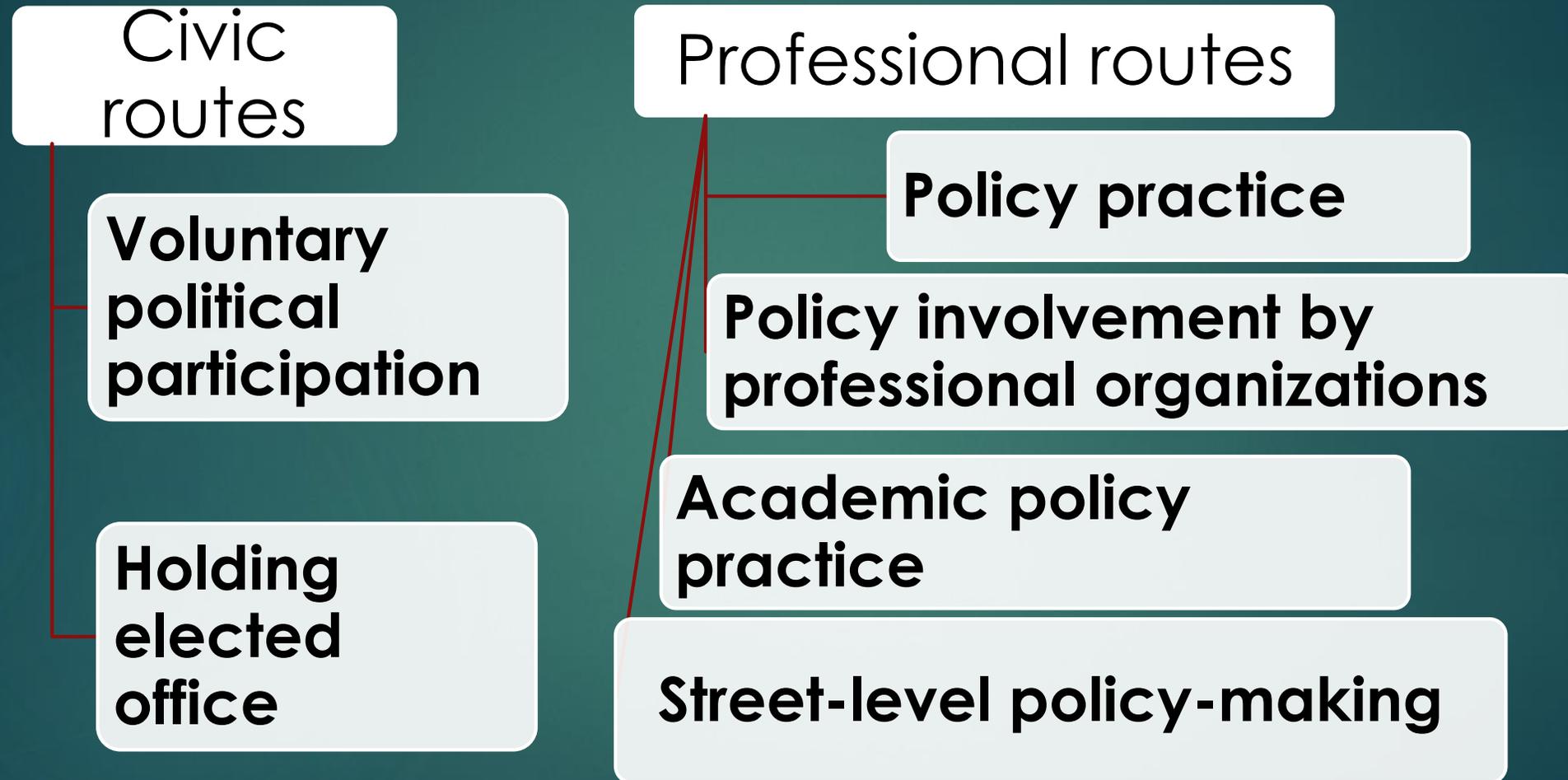
16

- ▶ “voluntary civic activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action—either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995, p. 38).
- ▶ 1. Policy activity, for which no remuneration is received
- ▶ 2. Activity undertaken by social workers outside their work as volunteers and private citizens

Ritter, J. A. (2007). Evaluating the political participation of licensed social workers in the new millennium. *Journal of Policy Practice*, 6(4), 61–78.

Routes for Social Worker Policy Actors

17



Social workers in parliamentary committees in the Israeli Parliament

18

- 1,013 meetings in which at least one social worker participated (1999-2006)
- 14% of the meetings held by 20 `relevant committees`
- In 83%, at least one social worker spoke
- In five committees social workers participated in over 40% of all meetings
- 667 social workers from central government, local government, and non-profits

Gal, J., & Weiss-Gal, I. (2011). Social policy formulation and the role of professionals: The involvement of social workers in parliamentary committees in Israel. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 19, 158-167.

Weiss-Gal, I., & Gal, J. (2014). Social workers as policy actors. *Journal of Social Policy*, 43, 19-36.