

# T01P05 / The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Fundamentals and Frontiers

**Topic :** T01 / POLICY PROCESS THEORIES

**Chair :** Tim Heinmiller (Department of Political Science, Brock University)

**Second Chair :** Kristin Olofsson (Oklahoma State University)

## GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Over the past few decades, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) has been one of the most applied and investigated approaches for understanding and theorizing the policy process. The framework has provided the basis for three lines of theoretical inquiry, focusing on policy change, policy learning, and the nature of advocacy coalitions. The burgeoning ACF literature includes applications in political systems around the world as well as applications in a wide variety of policy issues and policy sectors.

### General Objectives

The general objective of this panel is to advance the development of the ACF – and the study of policy processes – through a critical stocktaking of current conceptual and theoretical debates in the ACF. This includes issues related to the framework itself, as well as issues pertaining to the ACF's three theoretical lines of inquiry.

### Research Questions

A non-exhaustive list of research questions considered on the panel may include: the general utility of the ACF for understanding policy processes; lessons for policy practitioners derived from ACF findings; potential overlaps and syntheses with other theoretical approaches; ontological issues in the three lines of theoretical inquiry; conceptual issues; methodological challenges; investigations of existing ACF hypotheses; and, propositions of new ACF hypotheses.

### Scientific Relevance

The ACF focuses on the essence of government policy-making by conceptualizing and theorizing how civil society pressures are (or are not) translated into public policy outcomes. These questions are especially important in democratic countries in an era when the legitimacy of democracy seems under threat. The panel will provide an important opportunity for ACF scholars to share their work, learn from others' practices, and build connections, all of which are essential to shared scientific enterprise.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel welcomes papers that engage the ACF in the study of policy processes in any political system and policy area. Examples of relevant papers include:

- Papers that explore central ACF concepts, such as policy subsystems, coalition opportunity structures, coalition resources, etc.
- Studies that investigate established or novel hypotheses on the formation and maintenance of advocacy coalitions.
- Studies that investigate established or novel hypotheses on policy change.
- Studies that investigate established or novel hypotheses on policy learning.
- Papers that engage methodological challenges in the ACF.
- Papers that engage ontological challenges in the ACF.
- Reviews of ACF literature.
- Replications of existing ACF studies.
- Overviews of ACF-related lessons for policy practitioners.

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## Session 1 Advocacy Coalitions, Belief Change and Learning

Tuesday, June 27th 15:50 to 17:50 (KHS338)

### **Discussants**

Christopher Weible (University of Colorado Denver)

### **(Virtual) Advocacy Coalition approach, Focusing event and political dynamics in the local context (Disaster in Rio Doce, Brazil)**

Luciana Andressa de Souza (Federal University of Espírito Santo - Brazil)

The crisis caused by the Rio Doce disaster is an extreme case that contributes to thinking about the role of events focused on local political dynamics and the applicability of the ACF outside the context of North America and the European Union. Understanding how the nature of political change happens is still a challenge for the literature that is interested in political decision-making processes. This article develops an analytical model to compare the different types of responses of two Brazilian municipalities to deal with the impacts caused by the failure of the Fundão dam in Mariana (Minas Gerais, Brazil). The analysis combines the assumptions of the advocacy coalition approach (ACF) and focused events literature to examine the nature of the coalitions formed and the degree of policy changes implemented in both municipalities, which were observed, before the disaster, through the legacy the relationships between the various political and social actors in terms of state capacities, and, after the disaster, from the nature of the problems, the coalitions formed and the new instruments adopted to deal with these issues at the local level. To this end, the proposal presents a succinct balance of coalitions and decisions implemented at the state level, based on the secondary literature, and explores the subnational level in more detail through the comparison between two municipalities, located in the state of Espírito Santo, Colatina and Linhares, that had variations in the types of problems, coalitions and responses adopted to the technological disaster in Rio Doce. It is, firstly, about expanding the debate on the governance of the Rio Doce disaster, more focused on the construction of rules, agreements, mobilizations and alliances established at the federal and state levels, to understand how the municipalities dealt with their weaknesses (absence of civil society organizations, limited state capacity, weak regulation and management of impacts by the company itself - RENOVA), developed coalitions with different beliefs and patterns of response (types of instruments used instead of policy change or learning) to respond to the crisis provoked by the disaster on the Rio Doce. In addition, exploring the discretion of change beyond the already naturalized political learning and the often unattainable change in political beliefs, in local peripheral contexts, can be a way to think about the opposite (counterfactual), that is, to bring new insights to advance in understanding the gaps in the processes in which these changes (do not) happen.

### **(Virtual) Controversy, Contestation, and Continuity in Reservation Policy of India-The Lens of Advocacy Coalition Framework**

E Venkatesu (University of Hyderabad)

The affirmative-cum-reservation policy, which was introduced, initially, for the religious minorities, indigenous people, the untouchables, the rural artisan, and service-rendering communities, over a period of time extended to the women, and Economically Weaker Sections. The policy sub-system has got more than fourteen decades in India. The affirmative action policy was initiated during the British colonial period in the late 19th century. Subsequently, the indigenous Princely States and post-independent Indian State have been continuing.

The post-independent Indian State, while taking into account the existing reality of social, educational, and economic backwardness, continued the then-existing reservation policy even after the commencement of the Indian Constitution on 26th January 1950 with the rule of law, equality, social justice, etc. However, the existing reservation policy was challenged in the Supreme Court of India. The court verdict was that the continuation of the reservation policy, which was introduced before the commencement of the Constitution is against the right to equality. In response to the Supreme Court verdict, the Parliament introduced the First Amendment to the Constitution while justifying the reservations on the ground of making unequal social groups equal in a hierarchically structured social system.

Over a period of time, the series of events led to the formation of the anti- and pro-reservation coalitions. Broadly, the anti-reservationists consist of the upper social strata, well-to-do sections, and historically privileged groups of society. The pro-reservation coalition is the lower strata of society, socially, educationally, and economically backward classes and marginalized groups and forces working for social justice and constitutional rights.

The first instance of the controversy was that after the First Constitutional Amendment Act, the National level Commission was constituted in 1952 to study the socially and educationally backward classes and suggest measures for their amelioration. However, there was hardly any discussion about the commission report in the Parliament for the action.

The second instance was the constitution of the Second National level Commission to study the plight of the socially and educationally backward classes in 1978. India's government has decided to implement one of the 52 recommendations of the report, i.e., 27% reservations to the socially and educationally backward classes. However, there was an anti-reservation agitation in the country. Subsequently, it was challenged in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court, while following the principles of social justice and making unequal equals, upheld the government of India's decision to implement 27% reservations.

After the Supreme Court verdict for the implementation of 27%, over a period of time, the anti-reservationists changed their strategy to demand reservations for the Economically Weaker Sections of society. However, the National Commission for the Backward Classes and the Supreme refused to consider their plea as it was against the spirit of the Constitution. Article 15 and 16 of the Constitution supports reservations only for the socially and educationally backward classes but not for the economic backwardness. As a response to the growing agitation, the state has responded in the form of the 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act to provide 10% reservations to the Economically Weaker Sections and Supreme Court also upheld the policy decision.

The controversial reservation policy of India (policy sub-system) can be explained with the conceptual framework of the Advocacy Coalition Framework. Coalition-A is the anti-reservationists and Coalition-B is the pro-reservationists. ACF is the relevant and appropriate framework to understand the contested public policy in India.

## **(Virtual) ACF, learning and change - the role of forums and research on equity policies in Brazilian basic education**

Juliana Macedo (Universidade de Brasília)

This article focuses on the ACF as an analytical model for understanding conflict, learning and changes in public policy that address the problem of inequality. We aim to reflect on the 'clarifying role of research - data and information' and the importance of 'technical forums' as central elements to inter-coalition learning. What is the role of data and information and technical forums for policy change in Brazilian equity policy in basic education?

Using Brazilian basic education as a case study, between the years 2003 and 2022, this research sought to analyze how and to what extent these analytical categories were central to learning processes and changes related to the attempts to reduce racial and income inequalities in Brazilian education. There are two institutional landmarks related to our case: (i) the Law 10.639/2003, which includes the teaching of ethno-racial relations and African and Afro-Brazilian history in schools; and (ii) the nominal monitoring of access and monthly school attendance of the country's poorest children and adolescents through the educational conditionalities of the Bolsa Família program. The methodology used to answer the research question was qualitative. We used the process tracing method to sequence the interrelated events and identify the causal mechanisms connecting causes to outcome. Data collection was based on official documents, interviews and secondary bibliography. The research used NVivo software to code and analyze the collected data. In order to better define the demarcations of the contexts of the events over time, we adopted two starting points: first, the period from 2003 to 2014, and, second, from 2015 to 2022. We identified the existence of a specific forum for debate between the coalitions within the Ministry of Education, and the absence of a forum to address the issue of income. The main forum at national level is the National Education Council, which consists of two commissions: for basic education and for higher education. In the commission for basic education, the National Technical Commission on Diversity for Afro-Brazilian

Education Issues (Cadara) was created. On the one hand, robust and quantitative data and research were developed and used in the context of income-related actions. On the other hand, data and information were almost absent in the context of discussions about race in the existing forum. Furthermore, substantial - major - changes have been made in education policy on the basis of the income cut-off point, while minor changes have been made on the basis of the race cut-off point in the area of basic education. The findings highlight the importance of learning processes for policy change, with differentiated yet coordinated roles between data and information and technical forums, contributing to advances in analysis with ACF.

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## Session 2 Advocacy Coalitions and Policy Change

Wednesday, June 28th 08:00 to 10:00 (KHS338)

### Discussants

Karin Ingold (University of Bern)

Tim Heinmiller (Department of Political Science, Brock University)

### (Virtual) Advancing the Advocacy Coalition Framework's Theory and Methods on Major and Minor Policy Change

Allegra Fullerton (University of Colorado Denver)

Elizabeth Koebele (University of Nevada Reno)

Tanya Heikkila (University of Colorado Denver)

Karin Ingold (University of Bern)

Policy change is a primary focus of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). In doing such research, the ACF helps researchers by distinguishing major and minor changes, with the former related to changes in the policy core attributes of a policy subsystem and the latter related to changes in the secondary attributes of a policy subsystem. Unfortunately, research on major and minor policy change has stagnated with little advancement since the ACF emerged about four decades ago. The reasons are several, including (1) confusion between formal changes in the language of a policy versus impacts; (2) conceptualizing and operationalizing major versus minor change; (3) the tendency to analyze single instances of policy change rather than policy change as relational to other policy changes in the policy subsystem evolution; and (4) theoretical obscurity in what explains major and minor change. This paper directly addresses these four reasons via novel theoretical and conceptual thinking and methods, including coding the content of policy based on ACF's belief system components and offering a method for comparing policy change relationally (i.e., in what came before a new policy adoption). It applies this new thinking and methods to the study of the entire population of 77 instances of policy change in the four major policymaking venues in Colorado's oil and gas policy subsystems from 2007 through 2017. The results push the ACF out of its stagnation towards new lines of research and theoretical advances.

### Beyond Belief: Diverse Drivers of Policy Stability and Policy Change in the Case of Munition Dump Sites in the German Seas

Alexander Pechmann (Humboldt University in Berlin)

Over 1.6 million tons of dumped munitions in the German North and Baltic Seas constitute a dangerous legacy of the two World Wars. After almost 80 years since the dumping, there has recently been a political will to clear dumping sites. Using the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), the study asks why the issue of clearing munition dump sites is on the political agenda in Germany now. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and experts to test the hypothesis that unclear legislation and lack of information caused actors to shy away from addressing the issue. Particularly members of the public administration feared the possible repercussions of tackling an uncertain issue without a clear solution. The result was the dominance of two Contra-Clearance Coalitions, each supporting the states and the federal government, respectively, in their efforts to not assume responsibility. In this period of the early 2000s, a small Pro-Clearance Coalition started to form. Crucially for the subsequent policy change was that they

managed to uphold public attention on the issue. The coalition, consisting of researchers, individuals in public administration, and environmental organizations, was led by a shared policy belief that the munition issue had to be solved. In the 2010s, the coalition's efforts, together with technological change, triggered research that demonstrated the negative impact of munition on the environment. The new information confirmed the coalition's policy belief that clearance was necessary. Furthermore, the coalition was extended by another category of actors. The growing momentum of the Pro-Clearance Coalition and the prospect of the enormous financial resources needed to address the issue encouraged a rapidly growing maritime private sector to join. By presenting the possibility of manufacturing a platform for offshore disposal, the private sector was able to provide a tangible solution. With public attention, clear information, and a possible solution came the will of all major political parties to act and correct legislative issues. In terms of the ACF, the case confirms several of its hypotheses. For instance, the importance of technological change and subsequent policy learning between coalitions and different actors highlights that external and internal perturbations together are necessary for policy change. It also supports the hypotheses that policy-oriented learning is most successful for problems involving natural systems and for problems for which quantitative data exists. The case confirms that policy beliefs are crucial factors in the formation and stability of coalitions. The study showcases that, beyond beliefs, the interests of individuals and organizations may play a role in the formation and stability of coalitions. In a situation with unclear legislation and lack of information, policy stability may not solely be based on actors sharing the belief that the existing policy is best but could also be grounded in the fear that action would jeopardize their interests. Similarly, in a situation where ideological goals and profits align, a coalition advocating for policy change may not solely be made up of belief-driven actors but may also include those motivated by self-interest.

## **Red Light, Green Light: The Necessary Conditions of ACF Policy Change Theory**

Tim Heinmiller (Department of Political Science, Brock University)

ACF policy change theory is comprised of two hypotheses, each specifying a necessary condition for major policy change. The first hypothesis outlines four 'policy change pathways,' and posits that one or more of them is necessary for major policy change. The second hypothesis outlines two coalition power scenarios and indicates that one of them is necessary for major policy change. As necessary conditions, the hypotheses outline conditions that must be present for major policy change to occur, but their presence does not guarantee major policy change: there will be cases in which both necessary conditions are present, but major policy change does not occur. ACF scholarship has yet to investigate why major policy change sometimes occurs in the presence of these necessary conditions, yet sometimes does not, and this is the question taken up in this paper. It is investigated through a diachronic case study of recreational cannabis policy in Canada. Cannabis was criminalized in Canada in 1923, but efforts were made to decriminalize it in 2002-06 and to legalize it in 2012-18. The decriminalization effort failed (i.e., major policy change did not occur) while the legalization effort succeeded in 2018 when the Cannabis Act became law (i.e., major policy change occurred). Yet, there is solid empirical evidence that both necessary conditions of ACF policy change theory were present in both instances. This allows for a structured comparison (using a 'most similar systems' logic) of the decriminalization and legalization policy processes to investigate why major policy change occurred only the latter process despite the presence of the necessary conditions in both processes. Results from the comparison should identify some of the contextual case factors relevant in determining when major policy change does and does not occur.

## **(Virtual) Resource dependence and the formation of advocacy coalitions for adopting the Sugar Tax and Front-of-Package food labelling systems in Mexico.**

Anette Bonifant Cisneros (City University of London)

### **Abstract**

Advocacy coalitions are the bedrock of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), a policy process theory that, for more than 30 years, has contributed to our analysis and understanding of the policy process in different areas and political regimes globally. Within the ACF, advocacy coalitions were initially defined as systems "consisting of policy actors who share policy core beliefs and coordinate their behavior in nontrivial ways over extended periods of time toward some sort of shared outcome in a policy subsystem." (Weible et al., 2020, p.1060).

Several decades of empirical research have confirmed that advocacy coalitions exist. However, the most recent revision of advocacy coalitions' studies conducted by Weible and colleagues (2020) highlights that sharpening coalitions' conceptual definition and theoretical scope is essential to capture variations across them in different settings and throughout time. Weible et al. (2020, p. 1073) call to "broaden the theoretical scope for examining the type of beliefs that policy actors share in a coalition and the factors that shape their

coordination patterns.” This is mainly because coordination may not be influenced only by actors’ beliefs but other factors, such as trust or resource dependence, which ACF’s initial prepositions do not address.

This paper builds upon an exploratory study that aimed to capture the formation and stability of coalitions in two policy areas under the umbrella of obesity prevention in Mexico: the Sugar Tax and front-of-package food labelling systems. I conducted a qualitative Social Network Analysis with 32 stakeholders participating in the policy process in these two areas from 2012 until 2020. I employed interviews and sociograms to gather the data, which allowed me to capture coalition membership and network histories portraying coordination patterns over time.

My results suggest that, unlike shared policy core beliefs, resource dependence was the main factor enabling collaboration among policy actors in a nascent subsystem. For the Sugar Tax adoption, resources provided by an international philanthropic donor allowed for the identification of avenues of collaboration between health allies and the development of the influence strategy where the tax was selected as the first policy to implement. Moreover, the financial and technical resources provided by the donor enabled the formation of social capital (i.e., actors know each other, and it is easier to collaborate) that later contributed to the adoption of front-of-pack labelling systems.

This paper is part of a broader research project (Bonifant Cisneros, 2022). It aligns with the objectives of panel T01P05 by contributing to the area of “studies that investigate established or novel hypotheses on the formation and maintenance of advocacy coalitions.”

## References

Bonifant Cisneros, A. (2022). Health allies in the prevention of obesity: the adoption of the Sugar Tax and Front-of-package food labelling systems in Mexico. PhD thesis, University of York. <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/32102/>

Weible, C.M., Ingold, K., Nohrstedt, D., Henry, A.D. and Jenkins-Smith, H.C. (2020), Sharpening Advocacy Coalitions. *Policy Stud J*, 48: 1054-1081. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12360>