The Advocacy Coalition Framework

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Purpose of a Framework

Provides a shared research platform that enables analysts to work together describing, explaining, and sometimes predicting phenomenon within and across different contexts.

It gives analysts a common language, common scope and common questions to examine policy.

What is the Advocacy Coalition Framework?

The Advocacy Coalition Framework is used to understand and explain belief and policy change when there is goal disagreement and technical disputes involving multiple actors from several layers of government, interest groups, research institutions, and the media.

Developed to deal with intense public policy problems over many years.

Lens to understand and explain belief and policy change when there is goal disagreement and technical disputes involving multiple actors from several levels of government, interest groups, research institutions, and the media.

What puzzles are the ACF trying to solve?

- Advocacy Coalitions

  - Example: What are the structures of coalitions? How and why do they maintain themselves? How do they form?

- Policy-Oriented Learning

  - Example: How do people learn? What is the role of scientists and experts? How does learning occur among coalition allies and/or opponents? What is context of learning?

- Policy Change

  - Example: What factors drive policy change? What are the mechanisms of change? When does major change happen? When does minor change happen?

Agenda

- Scope of ACF

- Advocacy Coalitions

- Policy-Oriented Learning

- Policy Change

Scope of ACF

Would you trust a policy analyst who didn't know ACF stood for Advocacy Coalition Framework?
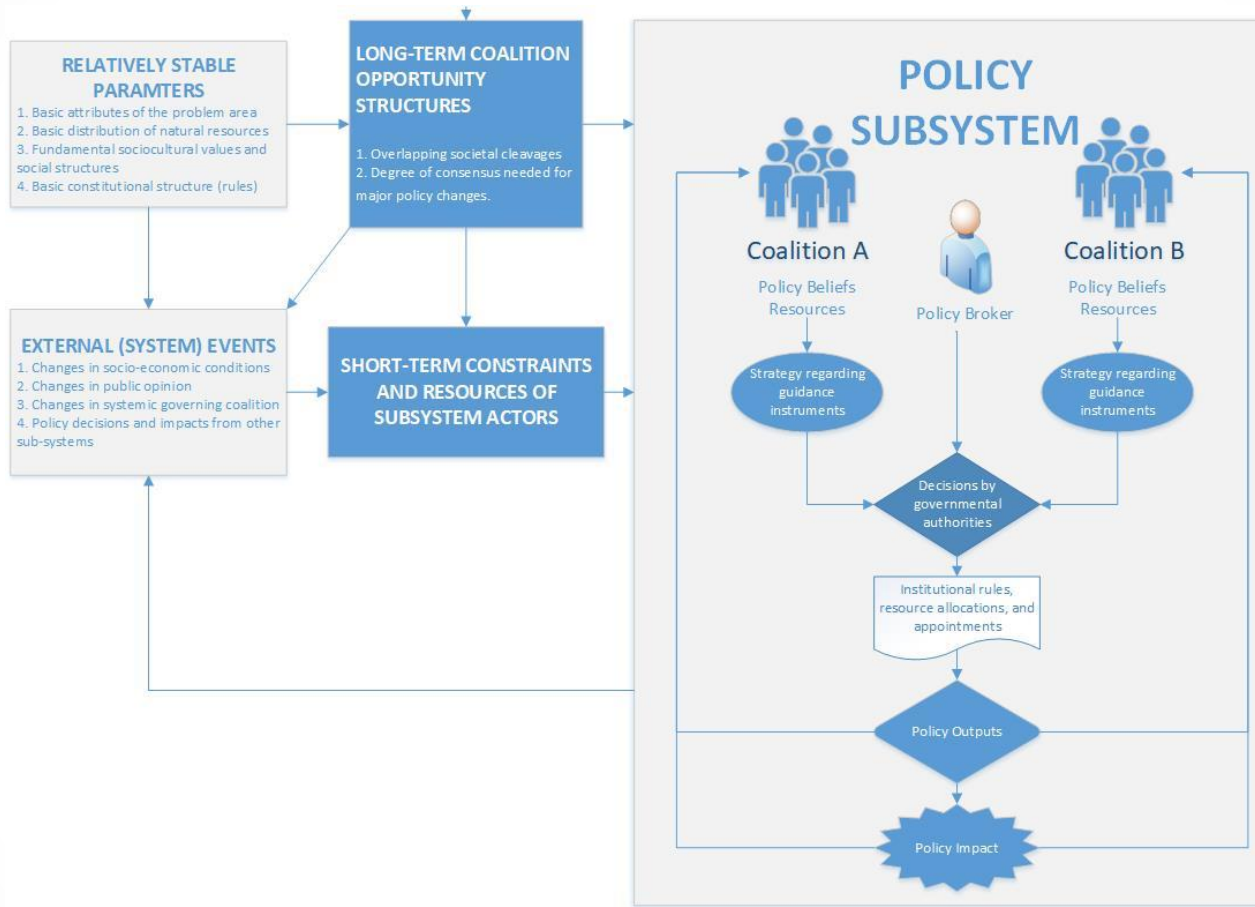
Scope of ACF

In picture form

What is a "Policy Subsystem"?

Policy subsystems are defined by a policy topic, territorial scope, and the actors directly or indirectly influencing policy subsystem affairs.

Defining Properties of a Policy Subsystem:

1. Subsystems contain an uncountable number of components that interact in nontrivial ways to produce outputs and outcomes for a given policy topic.

2. Policy subsystems demarcate the integrated and nonintegrated actors on a given policy topic.

3. Policy subsystems are semi-independent but overlap with other subsystems and are nested within yet other subsystems.

4. Policy subsystems often provide some authority or potential for authority.

5. Policy subsystems undergo periods of stasis, incremental change, and major change.

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Assumptions

- The policy subsystem is the primary unit of analysis for understanding policy processes.

- The set of relevant subsystem actors includes any person regularly attempting to influence subsystem affairs.

- Individuals are boundedly rational with limited ability to process stimuli, motivated by belief systems, and prone to experience the "devil shift."

- Subsystems are simplified by aggregating actors into one or more coalitions.

Assumptions (Continued)

- Policies and programs incorporate implicit theories reflecting the translated beliefs of one or more coalitions.

- Scientific and technical information is important for understanding subsystem affairs.

- Researchers should adopt a long-term perspective (e.g., ten years or more) to understand policy processes and change.

Key Concepts

- Policy Brokers: Seek to find reasonable compromise among hostile coalitions. Can include elected officials, civil servants and courts. Trusted by both sides.

- Resources: Can include: formal legal authority to make decisions, public opinion, information, mobilizable troops, financial resources, and skillful leadership.

- Venues: Potential areas within which coalitions try to influence beliefs or policy. This can be on several different layers of government, the courts, etc.

- External Events: Examples can be major socio-economic change, changes in public opinion, governing coalitions, and policy decisions from other sub-systems.

Advocacy Coalition

What is an advocacy coalition

An advocacy coalition contains people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers) who share a particular belief system – i.e. a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions – and who show a **non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time**.

Individuals in the ACF are assumed to have these attributes

- Boundedly rational, meaning they are motivated instrumentally by goals but are unclear how to achieve them and are limited in their cognitive abilities to process stimuli, such as information and experience.

- Given limited cognitive abilities, individuals simplify the world through their belief systems and are therefore prone to biased assimilation of stimuli. (*More about belief systems on next slide.*)

- People remember losses more readily than gains. Remembering losses and the tendency to filter and assimilate stimuli through belief systems results in the "devil shift," whereby actors exaggerate the power and maliciousness of their opponents.
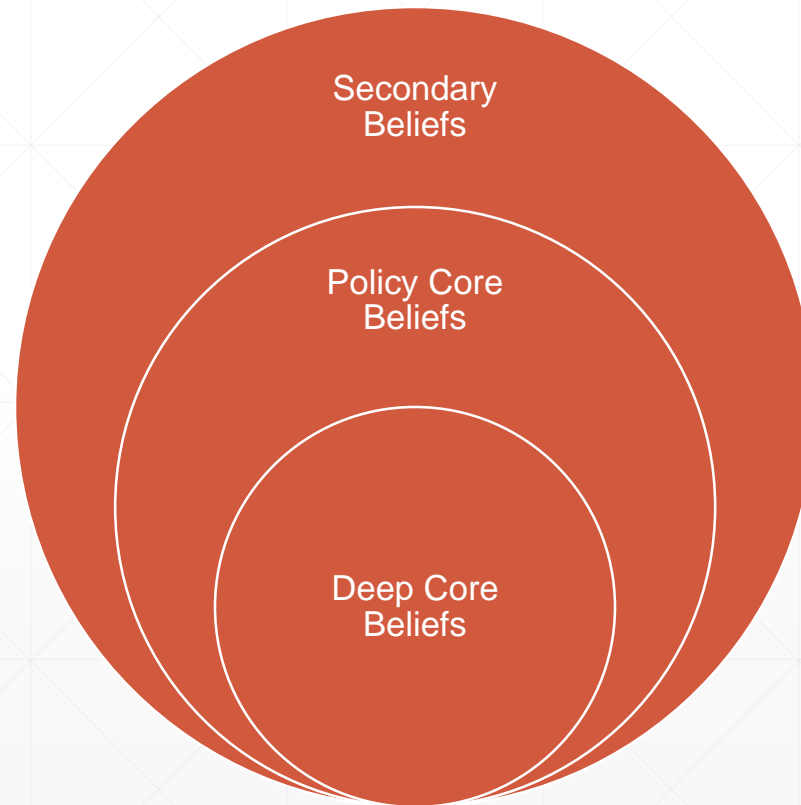
Advocacy Coalition Example

Unions

Alt-Weekly Media

Economic Justice Coalition

Faith Organizations

Liberal Academics

The belief system is the glue that keeps a coalition together.

- **Deep core beliefs** are the fundamentally normative values and ontological axioms; they are not policy specific and thus can be applicable to multiple policy subsystems. (*Fundamental and unlikely to change but too broad to guide detailed policy.*)

- **Policy core beliefs** are bound by scope and topic to the policy subsystem and thus have territorial and topical components. Policy core beliefs can be normative and empirical. (More specific but still unlikely to change.)

- **Secondary beliefs** deal with a subset of the policy subsystem or the specific instrumental means for achieving the desired outcomes in policy core beliefs. (*Most likely to change, as people learn about the effects of, say, regulations versus economic incentives.*)

Belief System

Secondary Beliefs

Policy Core Beliefs

Deep Core Beliefs

Belief System Example

$15 per hour minimum wage.

Workers should be paid more.

Poverty is a moral failure.

Advocacy Coalition Hypothesis

- On major controversies within a policy subsystem when policy core beliefs are in dispute, the lineup of allies and opponents tend to be rather stable over periods of a decade or so.

- Actors within an advocacy coalition will show substantial consensus on issues pertaining to the policy core, although less so on secondary aspects.

- An actor (or coalition) will give up secondary aspects of her (its) belief system before acknowledging weaknesses in the policy core.

- Within a coalition, administrative agencies really advocate more moderate positions than their interest group allies.

- Actors within purposive groups are more constrained in their expression of beliefs and policy positions than actors from material groups.

Policy-Oriented Learning

What is Policy-Oriented Learning?

Associated with changes in belief system of coalition members that include not only the understanding of a problem and associated solutions but also the use of political strategies for achieving objectives.

Four Categories of Explanatory Factors

- Attributes of forums: The venues in which coalitions interact, debate, and possibly negotiate.

- Level of conflict between coalitions: Level of conflict relates the extent to which actors perceive a threat to their policy core beliefs from their opponents' objectives or actions.

- Attribution of the stimuli: Attributes of the stimuli relate to the type of information and experience coalition actors are exposed to.

- Attributes of actors. Attributes of the individual include their belief systems, resources, strategies, and network contacts.
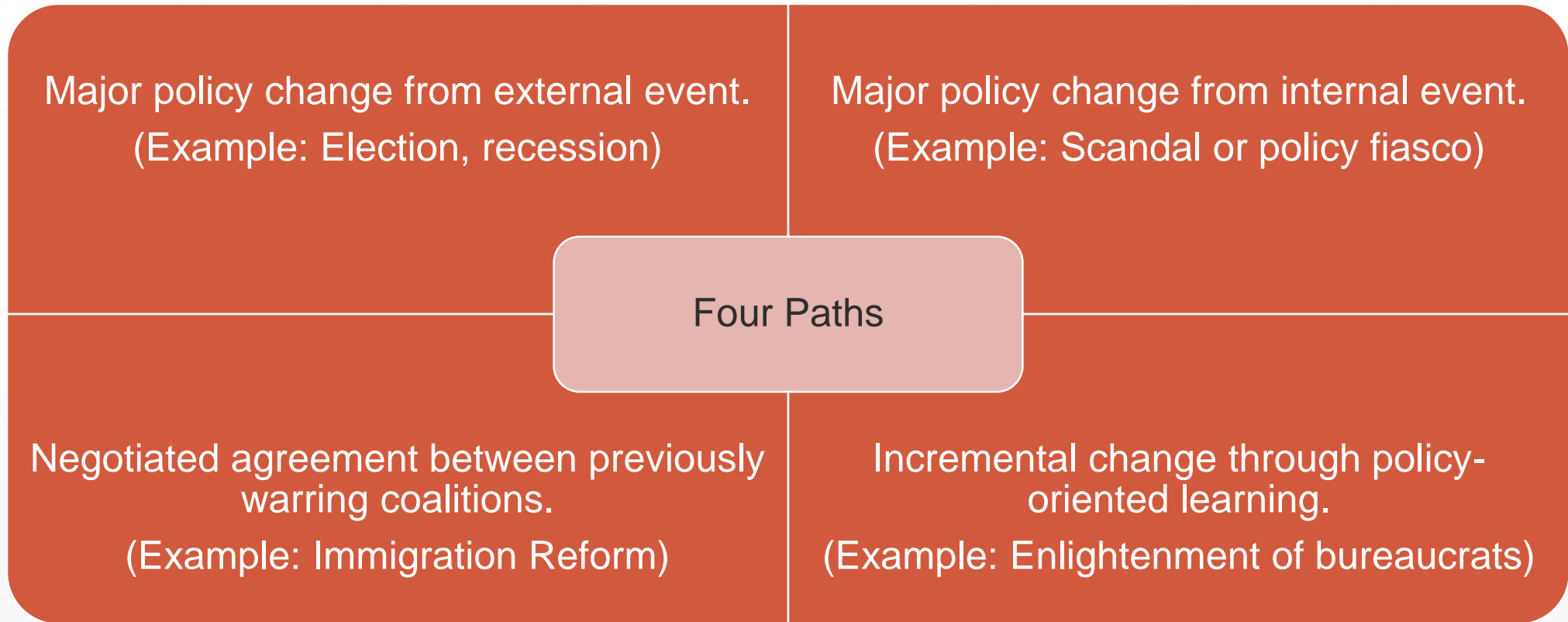
Learning Hypothesis

- Policy-oriented learning across belief systems is most likely when there is an intermediate level of informed conflict between the two coalitions.

- Policy-oriented learning across belief systems is most likely when there exists a forum that is prestigious enough to force professionals from different coalitions to participate, and dominated by professional norms.

- Problems for which accepted quantitative data and theory exist are more conducive to policy-oriented learning across belief systems than those in which data and theory are generally qualitative, quite subjective, or altogether lacking.

Learning Hypothesis

- Problems involving natural systems are more conducive to policy-oriented learning across belief systems than those involving purely social or political systems because, in the former, many of the critical variables are not themselves active strategists and because controlled experimentation is more feasible.

- Even when the accumulation of technical information does not change the views of the opposing coalition, it can have important impacts on policy – at least in the short run – by altering the views of policy brokers.

Policy Change

Policy Change

Major policy change from external event.

(Example: Election, recession)

Major policy change from internal event.

(Example: Scandal or policy fiasco)

Four Paths

Negotiated agreement between previously warring coalitions.

(Example: Immigration Reform)

Incremental change through policy-oriented learning.

(Example: Enlightenment of bureaucrats)

Hypotheses

- Significant perturbations to the subsystem, a significant perturbation internal to the subsystem, policy-oriented learning, negotiated agreement, or some combination thereof **are necessary, but not sufficient**, sources of change in the policy core attributes of a government program.

- The policy core attributes of a government program in a specific jurisdiction will not be significantly revised as long as the subsystem advocacy coalition that instated the program remains in power within that jurisdiction – except when the change is imposed by a hierarchically superior jurisdiction.

Appendix

References

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