

**Applying the Advocacy Coalition Framework to Environmental and
Natural Resource Issues; With a Special Emphasis on Indiana**

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Introduction (Background and Relevance)

Over the last quarter century there has been a rising conversation about environmentally related issues such as natural resource use, waterway protection, and climate change concerns. When paying attention to different news stories there seems to be two sides to this issue: the sustainable side and the fossil fuel side. Is that true? The Indiana General Assembly (IGA) has been passing bills for novel carbon sequestration projects as a method to combat climate change. There isn't much agreement on how to introduce this method says Karl Schneider of IndyStar (Indiana, 2023). In this paper, a theory known as Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) will be explored as one possible avenue to explain how policies such as the carbon sequestration projects bill are passed and how do those that are involved engage with that process.

The Advocacy Coalition Framework was developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith in the 1980s through case studies focused on environmental policy as a way of understanding why and how people engage in politics (Cairney, 2013). This foundation positions this framework as an ideal theory for exploring natural resource and climate change policy. In essence, the ACF describes a setting in which beliefs are the primary motivator to become involved in the policy process and policies are the method to allow beliefs to shape the world. It can be understood through four conceptual pillars (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993):

- Understanding policy process and change requires a timespan of a decade or more;

- Institutions come together into subsystems (coalitions) that influence governmental decisions;
- Subsystems must include some aspect of an intergovernmental dimension;
- Public policies can be conceptualized in the same manner as belief systems.

Although decisions, both in the background and debated in the public spotlight, can take years to turn into outcomes, they are often made through high levels of ambiguity (Cairney, 2013). This means that power and influence within and from a coalition can lead to policy outcomes as much as ethics and sound data. There are situations where government support is more present in one coalition over another (Ohno, 2022).

Beliefs can be the last thing that person holds on to in difficult times. ACF proposes three levels of belief (Cairney, 2013).

Core: Fundamental and enduring beliefs e.g. humans causing climate change, education is a human right, or free market is the best way to allocate resources

Policy: More specific though stable, and it reflects a coalition's views on the best way to achieve its goals e.g. carbon tax is the most effective way to reduce greenhouse gases, college tuition should be free or affordable for all students, or government regulation on the economy should be minimized

Secondary Aspects: The most malleable and likely to change with new information e.g. carbon tax should be set a certain level, the price of college should be this amount, or regulation should be set to this number of processes

In most cases coalitions undergo policy learning that sees them adapting to new information. ACF has a fundamental assumption that coalitions are actively attempting to understand the world around them in order to further their policy objectives (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993). Often this is where a secondary aspect will shift.

This learning occurs when new policy is being tracked as well as when an opposing coalition adapts how they present themselves. These adaptations arise within the wider scope that includes the nature of public agency systems and shocks that strike the current belief pattern (Cairney, 2013).

Consider the rise of scientific evidence pointing to human driven climate change as an external shock that has provoked ongoing shifts of discourse and tactics employed by entities that work with natural resources. Shocks of this nature are most prevalent in the natural sciences as compared to social sciences because it is more difficult to argue against the concrete nature of the observations (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993).

On the other side of a shock is one that is internal to a coalition. This can look like a failed policy that a coalition was in favor of or an opposing coalition's positioning as the best source of response after a major event e.g. environmental, social, or economical. Although events may occur, it doesn't cause a shock unless the coalitions respond to it in some way (Cairney, 2013).

ACF is a heavily researched framework. Policies can be stagnant or experience swift change. The research that is done by the framework helps to understand why there are certain trends in policy formation. It is an especially important topic as it relates to climate change and environmental regulation. These issues have had growing

policy battles as science has uncovered threats to the health of humans and the rest of life on Earth. Often the major values at play are environmental protection, economic stability, and social justice. ACF is useful in capitalist societies where science encourages belief shifts and a divided public opinion arises as society grapples with the evidence from the research (Ohno, 2022). Consider two international examples from Japan and Uruguay.

Japan's first large dam removal was a critical case of major policy change in the environmental sector (Ohno, 2022). Japan's dam policy was originally stated as unchangeable due to the iron triangle of politics, bureaucracy, and construction businesses. The pro-damn removal subsystem is considered nascent. The policy change took around 10 years and was marked by three major policy changes. First, citizens noted their decreased health after the dam was erected, and the governor expressed their desire to take it down. Second, it stayed because there was a high economic cost to remove it. Third, dissent grew and the national government motivated the state to act, so the dam was removed (Ohno, 2022). As the time passed, the pro-damn removal subsystem grew in power to influence the policy change.

In Uruguay's forestry sector where coalitions focused on the regulation of commercial tree plantations over the course of 30 years. Nascent strong-sustainability subsystems mature as information is available that shifts the underlying belief systems. Contrary to the pro- and anti-sustainability mindset often employed through medias, both coalitions carry a belief that environmental protection is important, yet they fundamentally disagree on how policy should move forward. One is focused on the balanced regulation of economic components whereas the other focused on the

fundamentally broken aspects of the plantations that lead to environmental and human harm. The nascent environmental coalition was able to gain power as three things occurred: they pressed the mature economic coalition to shift their policy beliefs, the international salience of their beliefs took hold, and when higher hierarchical government actors got involved then the changes accelerated (Kefeli et. al., 2023). These examples give context to the role that ACF can play in understanding why and how policies are changing in the natural resource space as international beliefs shift.

What has previous literature found?

Since Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith developed ACF it has been one of the most researched theories on policy interest. This section gives an expansive view on what research has discovered since ACF's foundation.

A coalition's ability to influence policy is directly related to their ability to control resources, redistribute political resources, and overcome political constraints; the resources available to coalitions may contain finances, leadership, authority, and scientific information (Malloy & Ashcraft, 2020; Weible, 2005). It has been found that shared beliefs are as important in decision making as any more tangible resource that a coalition has available (Kukkonen et. al., 2017).

Scientific evidence on climate has been changing rapidly. Although most research continues to look at ACF over the course of a decade, research has started to explore alternative methods to getting snapshots of subsystems every 0-3 years (Malloy & Ashcraft, 2020). This could allow a more accurate picture of how science is changing these coalitions. Although science is the raw materials that fuels debates on policy, it is the coalitions themselves that handpick which science will back their beliefs and policy

objectives (Gabehart et. al., 2023). Consider that beliefs are challenged not only by evidence, but by values and emotions as well (Gabehart et. al., 2023). Coalitions are constantly shifting to the signals and technical information shared by adjacent organizations (Gabehart et. al., 2023). Consider how science played a part in Uruguay's forestry sector and beliefs are playing a part in Indiana's General Assembly's carbon sequestration decisionmaking (Kefeli et. al., 2022).

It is often delivered that there are only two sides to policy battles within natural resources and environmental issues, though that isn't always the case. In a comprehensive review study that compiled evidence of different ways subsystems form they found that in rare cases there are four coalitions, infrequently there were three, most often there are two, and rarely are there none (Sotirov & Memmler, 2012). In another study it was proposed that there are three coalitions: economy, environmentalist, and science (Kukkonen et. al., 2017). The media plays a part both for and against the coalitions, although "pro-environmentalist" coalitions are less likely to change their minds to media alone (Kukkonen et. al., 2017; Weible, 2005). Where there are only two strong coalitions then there is public instability and stagnation (Gabehart et. al., 2023). At times when no dominant coalition exists then there is more likely to be multiple minor coalitions advocating on the issues they believe in (Weible, 2005). Often solutions are nuanced and this research supports the idea that coalitions will form where there is a need. Success of a coalition is influenced by legislation, administrative action, and/or public perception (Gabehart et. al., 2023).

Coalitions are made up of varied members. In the United States, natural-resource based industries, land users, professional and private land owners

typically shape an economic driven coalition. Environmental NGOs and administrations dominate the pro-environmental coalition. There is mixed representation amongst politicians, professionals, scientists, and recreationists across coalitions (Sotirov & Memmler, 2012). In countries where there are progressive standards on sustainability, not all “pro-business” coalitions were anti-environment; examples of this would include those companies in the green business sector (Gabehart et. al., 2023).

In contrast to ACF two additional frameworks to consider are the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) developed by Kingdon and and the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework (IAD) developed by Ostrom. Each framework has its strengths and weaknesses. When used together they can give a comprehensive perspective on the policy process.

MSA was built on top of of the garbage can model (GCM) which posits that a collection of disjointed interests and actors lead up to public decisionmaking. MSA is able to be applied in an almost universal fashion. It views three streams - policy, politics, and problem - that when they come together there is an opportunity for policymakers to shift strategies (Cairney & Jones, 2016). It has been noted to be limiting when seeking detailed observations of specific processes and outcomes.

IAD is a widely used framework to study how institutional arrangements emerge and change over time (Chua & Yau, 2022). Specifically it looks at actors, norms, institutional settings, incentive structures, and rules to breakdown the complexities of the action arena to piece together the whole situation (Chua & Yau, 2022). Although it has been used to breakdown such situations, it has also been critiqued for being overly

complex to use. In essence, it proposes that decision making is energized by self-interest as defined by each actor in the arena (McGinnis, 2011).

Additional theoretical connections

Much of this section gives credence to the ideas of ACF by using research that has not specifically centered on the theory. Main meditations on this section relate to how public agencies, its employee members, and elected political officials play a part in the policy process.

Public agencies are said to be neutral actors, though they are under strict guidelines from the current administration. A public agency sits between legislation and power although they may receive important support from the public. Consider the political conditions on the environment they are in: electoral outcomes, political stability, and policy initiatives in regimes all play parts into how an agency operates (Rainey et. al., 2021). Who and what the political leaders represent matters to the orders coming down on the institutions. There is a hierarchy set in place and legislators sit above the public institutions that carry out the policies determined on the floor (Long, 1949). For a moment, consider the relative liberty that non-public institutions have without the pressures of operating within a system of elected officials and branches of government (Rainey et. al., 2021).

Often legislation is premature when passed, and the responsibility of realizing how it plays out in the real world is a conversation managed by the public agency (Long, 1949). It has been shown that interest groups and their leaders are valuable actors in public decision making (Rainey et. al., 2021). It is assumed that agencies have a special technical competence which gives them a political initiative. Whether true in action or

not, they represent an embodiment of policy that is the potential of mobilizing power behind a policy. They don't do it in a vacuum, as research has shown that many private and non-profit organizations are intricately part of carrying out public policy (Rainey et. al., 2021). Although it may be to each public director's interests on how to lead their organization, they are in effect both leading and being led in often conflicting directions (Long, 1949).

There must be a collaboration amongst varied parties as what works for one agency or firm may lead the whole of society into tragedy if all were to adopt their tactics (Long, 1949). What this means is that the process of making a decision is done by testing opinion and uncovering new information, thus making coalitions a central contributor to effective decision making. Though bureaucracy and hierarchy are pervasive in governmental spaces, rivalry is encouraged (Long, 1949). At times, tensions can be present as an agency's employees are averse to the constructs and regulations that the legislators are giving to them. It is a balancing act that leading administrators of public agencies have to contend with as they must develop nonpartisan protocols that do not jeopardize the integrity of their activities (Khademian & Sharif, 2009).

As much as an agency would like to be a neutral actor those actors within their body have beliefs that, aside from their involvement with the administration, lead them to identifying with an advocacy coalition with a certain belief on an issue. Although the agency may be mandated to be neutral, as long as it is within the bounds of current policy and law, the constituents choose who to engage with in their daily public service activities. Political commitment as held by public administrators has a significant impact

on practice and engagement with the agency's work (Rainey et. al., 2021). Imaginatively this could include either looking aside on a regulation compared to being strict on enforcing a regulation; It could also look like choosing one organization for public funding over another. It is not unheard of for a government official to use private contractors to justify the pursuit of certain political and social objectives that they can't justify through the normal legislative process (Rainey et. al., 2021). These scenarios get into the ethics of public managers, which will not be explored in depth here. Often difficulty in coordination and control of a result arises from the complexity of the many issues, interests, and participants involved in the policy process (Rainey et. al., 2021).

Interviews with Indiana Coalitions

As part of the research process on how ACF can offer insight into how climate and natural resource oriented issues are influenced by interested actors, interviews with Indiana organization members were held to acquire experiential information from the field. While reviewing this information keep in mind how the framework and theory can support comprehension of the policy process in reality.

At the surface level, the actors chosen for the interviews represented different coalitions though where one coalitions begins and another ends becomes gray when considering their testimonials. In execution, all interviews were held to 30 minutes and were structured in a similar style. Each respondent was asked five open-ended questions one at a time. There has been an effort to maintain some ambiguity into the exact responses of interviewees. Those questions are:

1. What is [organization] general approach to advocacy and policy work?
2. How does [organization] partner with others to work through their policy goals?

3. How does [organization] work with those that are against their policy goals?
4. How does [organization] work with public agencies?
5. How do changing administrations affect the work that [organization] does?

The actors that were interviewed are:

- Hoosier Environmental Coalition (HEC) - Program Manager
- Indiana Oil & Gas Association (INOGA) - Member
- Illinois Oil & Gas Association (ILOGA) - Executive Director
- Citizen Action Coalition (CAC) - Organizer
- AES Indiana (AES) - Director
- Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) - Director of

Legislation & Environmental Justice division team leader

More actors were invited to interview including Indiana Farm Bureau, Indiana Wildlife Federation, and Indiana Department of Natural Resources, though they were not able to be carried out as part of this research. Most of the actors were not deeply knowledgeable with ACF, with the exception of AES, though all could speak at detail about approaches their organization uses to achieve its desired policy objectives.

Indiana currently operates through a Republican trifecta which means that both public agency and active political action is directed through the single party (Ballotpedia, 2023). Perspective on the current agenda from IN Republican states, “Indiana can and should be a leader in coal production. We are committed to working with the energy and coal industry in Indiana to utilize and to develop clean coal technology...We support a broad “all of the above” energy portfolio and believe free markets should be encouraged to find effective and efficient energy solutions, not government mandates” (Indiana

Republican, 2022). ACF poses the idea that policies don't typically change until the leader in a one-party system changes (Ohno, 2022).

To give additional context to this political environment, responses from the interview question, "What is the [organization] general approach to policy process?" were scaled from very passive to very active.

What is the [organization] general approach to policy process?				
Very Passive	Passive	Neutral	Active	Very Active
	Org. 2	Org. 3 Org. 6	Org. 1 Org. 5	Org. 4

Take note that the organizations with more sustainability focused missions vocalize that they are active to very active in their efforts taken to advocate on policy. This is important to recognize as it indicates where political power is not making decisions that are in line with an organization's mission, then more energy must be used to advocate that position.

A glaring discovery was that in every interview there was expression that they would work with anyone that they could lock arms with to achieve a desired policy outcome. Consider the following example of two organizations with different missions.

At the federal level, the American Petroleum Institute (API) typically stands in opposition to sustainable climate policy e.g. carbon tax, GHG emissions regulation, and renewable standards (LobbyMap, n.d.). API is one of the trade associations that works with Indiana Oil & Gas (INOGA), as API represents the interests of the oil and gas industry. INOGA is a volunteer based group in Indiana that is made up of individuals

that largely work within the industry. On the other side is Citizen Action Coalition (CAC) in Indiana which claims to be the “oldest and largest consumer and environmental advocacy organization” in Indiana (Citizens, 2023). They are led to coordinate citizen action to conserve natural resources and protect the environment.

In 2022, Indiana House of Representatives proposed HB 1209: Carbon Sequestration Projects. CAC labeled it as a bad bill if not because State of Indiana would not have to claim liability nor ownership of the resources used to carry out the bill (Citizens, 2023). In the interview with INOGA, it was shared that they also opposed the bill along the lines that it was only going to benefit one company and not others nor residents of the state (INOGA, 2023). Though these two opposing coalition members don’t typically work together, they advocated a similar position on this bill. Policy beliefs are the glue that hold coalitions together (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993). An important note is that the bill did pass very easily through state government which illustrates the power of having governmental authority in a coalition.

Taking a deeper look at question four, “How does [organization] work with public agencies?” organizations varied in how their responses conveyed that relationship as regulatory or legislative focused.

How does [organization] work with public agencies?				
Strong Legislative Focus	Moderate Legislative Focus	Balanced	Moderate Regulatory Focus	Strong Regulatory Focus
Org. 1	Org. 4	Org. 5	Org. 2	Org. 3

Of the organization's interviewed there was a spread of responses. An important consideration here is that all three entities that use natural resources to provide service to citizens (AES, INOGA, ILOGA) have a regulatory focus. Both HEC and CAC didn't express that as a central part of the relationship with public agencies. None of the actors interviewed agreed with everything that the state's public agencies do; the most often noted institutions were: Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Department of Environmental Management (IDEM), and Utility Regulation Committee (IURC). CAC expressed that they experienced both technical expertise and passion from public managers, but that they are creatures limited by statute (CAC, 2023). INOGA's members experience DNR and IDEM as regulatory bodies, and most often hear from IDEM when there is a problem (INOGA, 2023). These two sentiments are contrasted with ILOGA's presence as a mediator between tense ideas at the state level (ILOGA, 2023). There could be a shift in how these entities interact with public agencies if policies for more renewable energies were to take root.

There is evidence that the sustainable coalition is growing. In the last year HEC hired a Law Director, which gets them access to Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission, which CAC noted that a lawyer is pivotal when advocating in the utility space (HEC, 2023; CAC, 2023). This is a major step into maturity as noted by Ohno (Ohno, 2022). Additionally, a nascent subsystem is evolving focused on solar energy (HEC, 2023). Oil & Gas is also undergoing its own type of evolution as they start a new committee which indicates ongoing deliberation of new ideas (ILOGA, 2023).

Conclusion

The Advocacy Coalition Framework provides a flexible approach to understanding the interplay of players focused on a specific policy outcome. Natural resource and environmental issues offer an opportunity to explore this framework in depth both because of its origins and the increasing maturing coalitions fueled by climate science and international belief shifts. Though in many areas of the world nascent coalitions focused on environmental sustainability are seeing regular growth, in the state of Indiana there is stagnation due to the single political party dominance. The Republican party has set the majority of political direction in the state for the last 24 years which directly impacts the makeup and enforcements on public agencies that to carry out legislative decisions. There are those public managers with high scientific and technical skill within the public institutions that could act differently if there were a clear focus on environmental sustainability from the governmental hierarchy. This is to say that coalition ideology has to contend with the current leading political ideology.

There is evidence of beliefs shifting in the state though slowly. It is clear at this time that the free market, oil & gas centered coalition is mature and holding power. There are the occasional threats that they have to speak up on, and there are those battles in the statehouse that they will lose. In relative comparison to the sustainable coalition, those are fewer and further in-between. Indiana presents as leaning towards a two coalition landscape with opportunities for shared policy goals.

Continued monitoring and research is required to understand how the two coalitions are evolving as time goes on. Carbon sequestration bills have appeared in the last few legislative sessions, and they have drawn focused attention from organizations in both coalitions. Continuing research from this point over the next 3 years to get a

snapshot of these environmentally focused bills will give an updated impression on the state of advocacy actors in Indiana. ACF continues to offer insight to policy action through this study. It warrants further exploration how public agencies fit into their coalitions separately from the political conditions that they are under.

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