

The Advocacy Coalition Framework

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1. What is ACF?

Defining ACF: The Key Focus

- The key focus of ACF is to make sense of complex policy systems that include...
 1. Multiple actors and levels of government
 2. Process policy in different ways (ranges from politicized disputes to issues out of the public eye, handled by specialists)
 3. Take a long time, 10+ years, to turn decisions into action

Defining ACF

- An advocacy coalition contains:
 - People from all different backgrounds/positions that share a particular belief system
- ACF focuses on the interactions among advocacy coalitions within a policy system + external environment
- Coalition action takes place within subsystems...
 - Subsystem—basically the set of actors who are involved dealing with a policy problem
 - Actors within a subsystem can range from the levels of government to journalists/political analysts
 - These exist within the wider system that sets parameters for action + provides coalitions with restrictions/opportunities

ACF Subsystems: The main groups involved

- Varying number of coalitions (usually ranging from 1-4)
- Policy brokers
 - Core role: minimize conflict and create compromises for the coalitions involved
- The governing authority, also known as a “sovereign”
 - Makes the policy decisions discussed and oversees the policy-making process

Side note: it's not unusual for one coalition to dominate a subsystem, which causes some negotiated settlements to favor one coalition's beliefs.

The 3 Beliefs: The glue for advocacy coalitions

- Deep Core Beliefs

- Least likely to change in light of empirical evidence
- Underlying personal philosophy
- Too broad to successfully guide policy-specific behavior
- Ex: belief on whether people are evil or socially redeemable, how we rank values like freedom/security

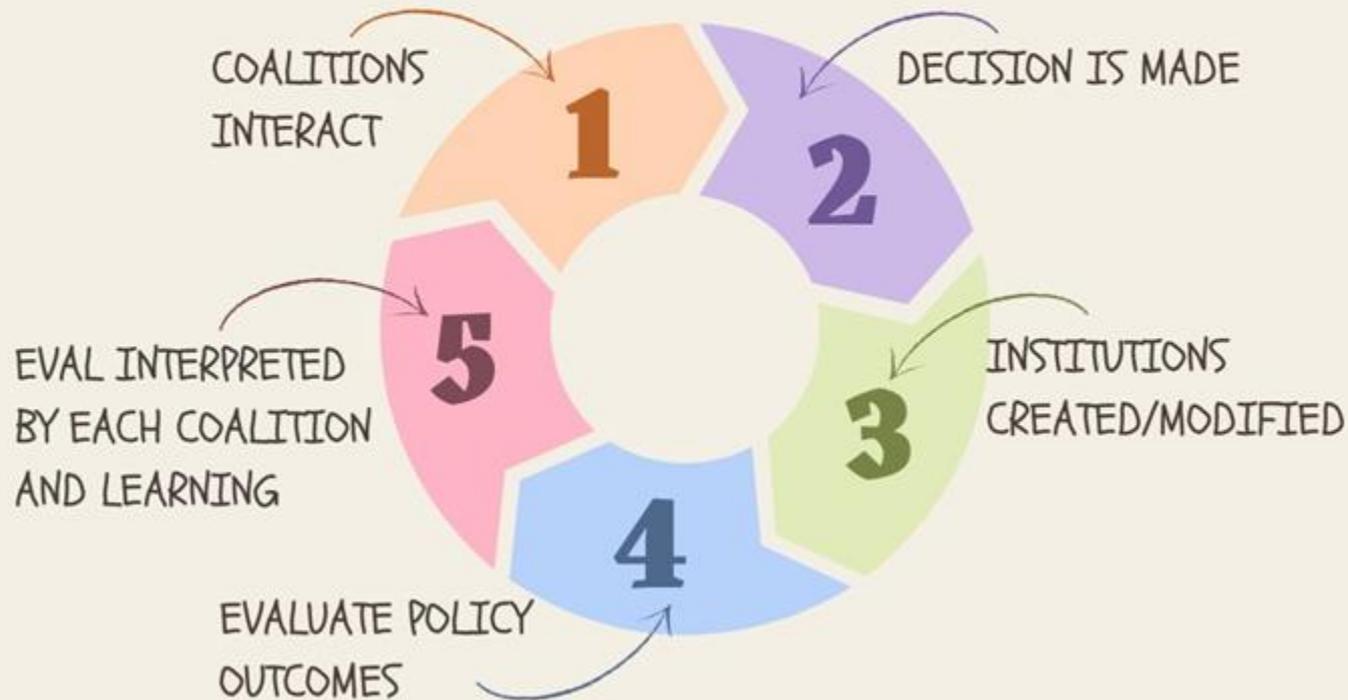
- Policy Core Beliefs

- Fundamental policy positions and employed within subsystems
- Generally stable, but can change
- Ex: the balance between government and market, the proper distribution of power between branches of government

- Secondary Aspects

- Relates to the funding, delivery, and implementation of policy goals
- The new information gathered to support the policy process
- Ex: an actor/coalition tweaks their beliefs in light of new information to improve the delivery of specific policies

ACF OVER A POLICY CYCLE



Causes for ACF Modifications

1. Minor policy changes that take place within subsystems
 - a. When coalitions engage in policy learning, secondary aspects appear
 - b. Coalitions learn on their own terms and pick information that doesn't completely undermine the group's core beliefs/source of cooperation
 - c. Coalitions sometimes adapt and align with the beliefs of another coalition if it is too important to ignore
2. Major changes that are prompted by external, unforeseeable events
 - a. Events cause coalitions to re-examine their core beliefs, especially if the the "external event" has ties with past policy failure
 - b. External events are their own being, and coalitions can influence the government how to understand and respond to the event

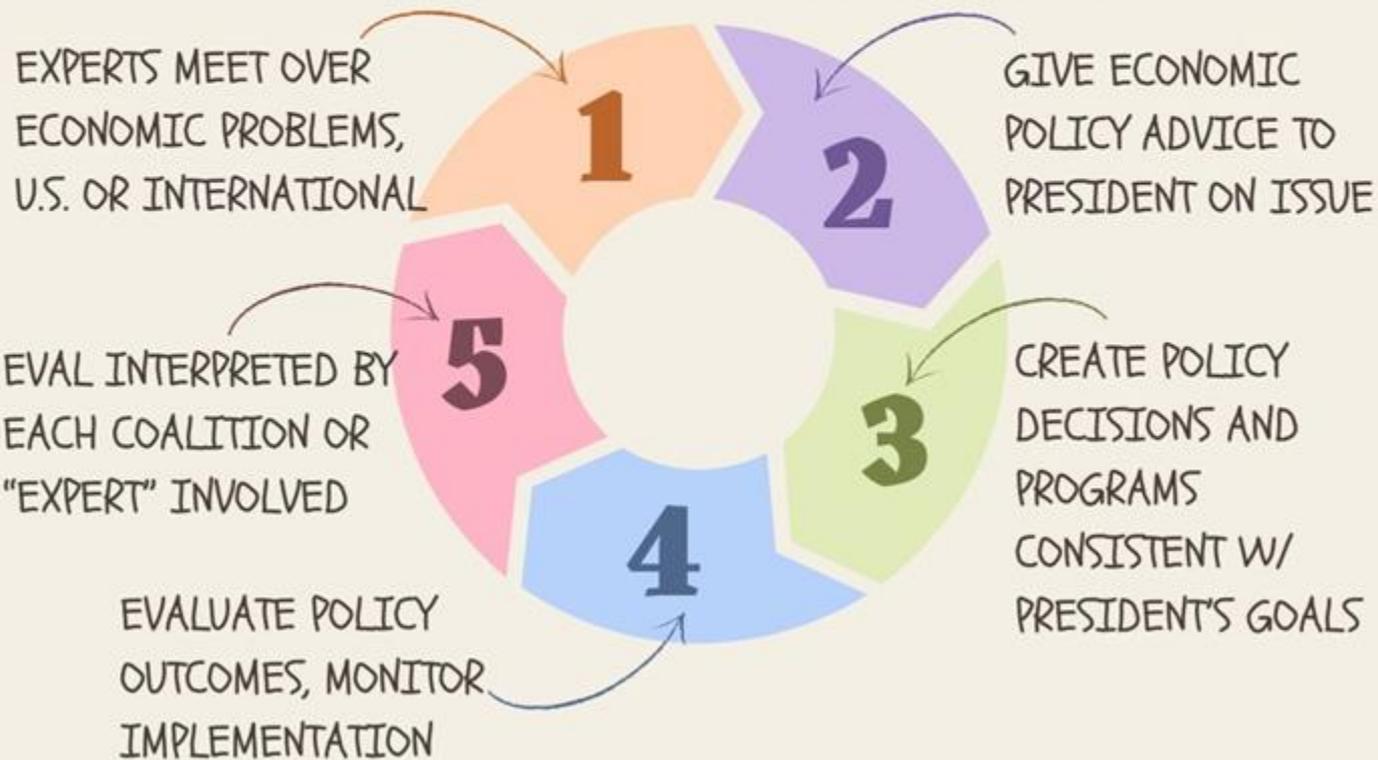
2. An Example of ACF: The National Economic Council

The National Economic Council (NEC)

- Created in 1993 as an advisory board for the President on United States-centered and global economic policy
 - Part of the Executive Office of the President
- 4 functions:
 - Create and maintain policies for U.S. and international economic issues
 - Give economic-centered advice to the president
 - Watch/evaluate policy decisions to make sure they are consistent and successful
 - Monitor implementation of policies
- Has a main NEC Director and has a staff of experts in different fields:
 - Infrastructure, manufacturing, research/development, small business, financial regulation, housing, technology/innovation, and fiscal policy

Source: The White House's Official Website, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/nec/>

ACF WITHIN NATIONAL ECONOMIC COUNCIL



3. Limitations/Criticisms of ACF

Criticisms

- Difficult to know where coalitions end and policy-makers begin
 - There's a mix between the two and many people wear different hats within the policy process
- Most of the ACF studies remain within environmental/energy policies
 - Needs more variety
- ACF is loosely applied without full understanding of the process by other authors/researchers, aka generalizing or lacking specificity
- Has the potential to create a misleading picture of scientific research
 - Ignores that many studies aren't replicated, accept a large number of findings on trust
- ACF followers don't like the "stages heuristic" model but they still focus on a cycle change of "over a decade or more."
 - Basically recreating the stages heuristic while saying it's outdated
- Can cause people to stretch their theories/beliefs too much to match evidence found instead of seeking a more convincing theory
 - People adapt theories to protect core argument instead of admitting when they are wrong

Reading examined:

Cairney, Paul, 'Paul A. Sabatier, “An Advocacy Coalition Framework of Policy Change and the Role of Policy-Oriented Learning Therein”', in Martin Lodge, Edward C. Page, and Steven J. Balla (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Public Policy and Administration*, Oxford Handbooks (2015; online edn, Oxford Academic, 7 July 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199646135.013.24>.