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How's the Advocacy Coalition Framework Doing? Some Issues since the 2014

Agenda.

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Abstract: This article presents an international review of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) from 2015 to 2018. It is based on a search of the Web of Science database, using the term “advocacy coalition.” 46 empirical works that use the ACF as the main model or one of the main models for the analysis of public policies were analyzed. Bibliometric data, research methodologies and theoretical components have been considered in this analysis. In addition, this article fills in a gap in previous reviews of the ACF, because it presents four applications of this model in Latin America. This research is based on data from the SciELO database. Our conclusions show that the research agenda proposed in 2014 has evolved over the last few years, but it still presents challenges and possibilities for researchers interested in the use of the ACF which remain unexplored. We also offer some recommendations for future research.

Keywords: advocacy coalition framework. policy analysis. policy process. policy change.

Introduction

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) is a model for analyzing public policies proposed by Paul Sabatier (1988), whose main interests included how changes in public policies occur, and how they guide the learning of the actors involved in policy subsystems during their implementation processes. Created in the beginning of the 1980s, it was originally consolidated in the book *Policy Change and Learning: An Advocacy Coalition Approach* (SABATIER; JENKINS-SMITH, 1993), in which six empirical studies were presented. The authors' most recent work was published in 2014, and it presented a history of its foundations, evolution and the research in progress (JENKINS-SMITH et al., 2014).

Systematic reviews of ACF applications have also been performed during its trajectory. In this article we will focus on two of them. The first reviews 80 studies that applied the model between 1987 and 2006 (WEIBLE; SABATIER; MCQUEEN, 2009). The second encompasses 161 ACF applications from 2007 to 2014 (PIERCE et al., 2017). This article presents a new international review of the application of the ACF, considering the period from 2015 to 2018. It was initially motivated by the wish to verify how the most recent studies have been conducted since Professor Paul Sabatier's last publication regarding the ACF in 2014. During our study, however, we have noted an almost total lack of Latin American works in recent reviews, with only one Brazilian study identified (CARVALHO, 2001). In 2015, however, Brazilian authors

promoted a review of the use of ACF in Brazilian theses and dissertations and found 23 applications of the model from 2010 to 2013 (CAPELARI; ARAÚJO; CALMON, 2015). Thus, we have made an extra effort to search for ACF applications in Latin America, reviewing works in Spanish and Portuguese. The results of this search are presented and discussed separately. The rest of the text is structured as follows. Section 1 presents an overview of the ACF theoretical background. Sections 2 and 3 cover methodological aspects and the bibliometric data for these publications, respectively. Section 4 presents the results and discusses the research methodologies and the theoretical components related to the ACF in the studies analyzed. Section 5 presents the search results for applications of the ACF in Latin America and some related considerations. The final section summarizes our conclusions and recommends possibilities for future research.

1. Theoretical Background

The ACF is a model for public policy analysis which seeks to understand the changes that occur in public policies and the learning resulted from its implementation process. It adopts the premise that the process of elaborating public policies is complex and therefore those who wish to exercise some influence on this process need to specialize. This specialization occurs in policy subsystems, whose participants seek to regularly influence public policies of interest to them. In this way, the ACF adopts the policy subsystem as its unit of analysis (SABATIER; JENKINS-SMITH, 2007). The ACF assumes a model of an individual whose behavior is guided by a system of normative beliefs. This system is composed of three hierarchical levels which aggregate these beliefs according to the individual's resistance to change. *Deep core beliefs* have to do with assumptions related to ontological and normative assumptions about human nature and their fundamental values, and they are the most difficult beliefs to alter. The *policy core* consists of the beliefs related to the public policy itself, including the seriousness and the cause of policy problems within the subsystem. Finally *secondary beliefs* refer to more specific operational issues regarding policy, and these are more likely to be modified (SABATIER; JENKINS-SMITH, 1999, 2007)

To facilitate the understanding of policy subsystems, the ACF proposes the aggregation of political actors into advocacy coalitions, based on their shared beliefs and coordination strategies. In addition, the model indicates six resources that can be used by coalitions to guide their strategies: the legal authority to make policy decisions, public opinion, information, mobilizable supporters, financial resources and skillful leadership (SABATIER; JENKINS-SMITH, 1999, 2007). Understanding policy change and policy-oriented learning are two of the main objectives of the model. This learning can occur on a personal level, within a coalition or between coalitions. In terms of change, the ACF assumes that governmental programs are translations of policy-oriented beliefs that can be conceived of and measured hierarchically as

belief systems. For this reason, changes that occur in the policy core are greater, while changes in secondary aspects are smaller. The ACF establishes four pathways that lead to change: policy-oriented learning, significant external or internal subsystem changes (shocks), and negotiated agreements between rival coalitions (JENKINS-SMITH et al., 2014). The ACF currently consolidates twelve hypotheses related to its main theoretical aspects: advocacy coalitions, policy-oriented learning, and policy change. These hypotheses have been proposed by the authors as a flexible part of the model, subject to revision to the extent that new evidence from applications introduce contributions that permit the progressive promotion of necessary adjustments to the model (for a detailed description of each one of the model hypotheses and an overview of the conducted reviews, see Jenkins-Smith et al, 2014, pp. 195-204).

2. Method

In this article, we have reviewed 46 empirical works that use the ACF as the main model or one of the main models for the analysis of public policies. This section presents the search, filter and exclusion criteria used for the article selection. The initial search was performed on May 26, 2018 using the *Web of Science (WoS)* database from 2015 to 2018, and it returned 143 results. We used the search term “advocacy coalition” which also includes works that use the complete term advocacy coalition framework. After this step, we selected the articles with impact factors in *Journal Citation Reports (JCR)* or the *SCImago Journal Rankings (SJR)* equal to or greater than 0.8, and those classified in the *Qualis Periódicos* ratings with values equal to or greater than B3. This methodological option is justified by our preoccupation in finding publications of high quality, considering established international indices such as the *JCR* and *SJR*, as well as the *Qualis-Periódicos*, which is widely accepted by the Brazilian academic community. After applying this filter, 26 articles were eliminated.

The third step consisted of analyzing the titles and abstracts, and when in doubt, the introduction to verify the pertinence of the search results. After this analysis, 49 articles were excluded because they did not deal with the ACF, or referenced the model in their theoretical sections, but did not use it in their data analysis. The fourth step consisted of reading the articles in their entirety. Twelve articles were excluded because they do not use the ACF as their principal model or one of their principal models in conducting their research and interpreting their results; three articles were excluded because they are already considered in other articles about the same policy by the same authors; and seven theoretical works were excluded, because they did not permit the analysis of ACF applications, which is the objective of this review.

3. Bibliometric Data Analysis

This analysis considers the journals, the distribution of the publications per year, the

authors and their institutions of origin, as well as the thematic and geographic characteristics of the policies analyzed. Because of the space restrictions, the results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 – An Overview of ACF Applications (2015-2018)

Journals	Number of Applications	%
<i>Review of Policy Research</i>	4	8.7
<i>Policy Studies Journal</i>	3	6.5
<i>Energy Policy</i>	2	4.3
<i>Policy Sciences</i>	2	4.3
<i>Public Administration</i>	2	4.3
Others (Just 1 application)	33	71.7
Total	46	100
Year of Publication	Number of Applications	%
2015	13	28.3
2016	10	21.7
2017	17	37
2018 (until May 26)	6	13
Total	46	100
Continents of Publishing Institutions	Number of Applications	%
Europe	20	43.5
North America (United States and Canada)	18	39.1
Intercontinental	5	10.9
Asia	2	4.3
Oceania	1	2.2
Total	46	100
Continents of Analyzed Policy	Number of Applications	%
Europe	17	37
North America (United States and Canada)	16	34.7
Asia	6	13
Intercontinental	3	6.5
Africa	2	4.3
South America	1	2.2
Oceania	1	2.2
Total	46	100
Policy Area	Number of Applications	%
Environment and Energy	26	56.5
Economic Policies	7	15.2
Health	7	15.2
Social Policy	3	6.5
Education	1	2.2
International Relations	1	2.2
Security	1	2.2
Total	46	100

4. Results and Discussion

In this section we will present the results regarding the research methodologies and discuss the theoretical components involved in the 46 works analyzed. In this case, comparisons will be made with the results found in the review conducted by Pierce et. al. (2017)

and the extent to which these articles converge with the research agenda proposed by Jenkins-Smith et. al. (2014).

4.1. Research Methodologies Adopted in Applications of the ACF

We have verified the nature of the work (descriptive, explanatory, exploratory), the approach (qualitative, quantitative, mixed); and the research method used (survey, experimental/semi-experimental, documental research, case study, action research, ethnography, multiple methods). In addition, we have verified the collection instruments (questionnaire, interview, documents, observation, focus groups, others, unidentified), and analysis techniques.

Nature and Approach of the Research. Of the 46 articles analyzed, 31 are descriptive (67.4%), followed by 11 studies of a mixed nature (23.9%), three explanations (6.5%) and an intervention (2.2%). The predominance of descriptive studies is reflected in the approaches used by the researchers: 33 (71.7%) works adopt a qualitative approach, 11 (23.9%) adopt a mixed approach, and just two (4.3%), a quantitative approach. In comparison with the last international review, this reinforces the preference of researchers for qualitative (66%) or mixed (24%) approaches (PIERCE et al., 2017). One of the critiques made of the ACF is that it reveals what is already obvious, the identification of the opposing sides in policy debates. Sabatier & Weible (2007) argue, however, that its objective is much greater, because the model should make it possible to change the belief system of the coalitions and their relationship with policy change. The predominance of studies of a descriptive nature shows that the ACF is still often used to identify coalitions and describe how their actions influence the policy process (BARNES; VAN LAERHOVEN; DRIESSEN, 2016; CHIKOTO-SCHULTZ; UZOCHUKWU, 2016; MCDONALD; GALLAGHER, 2015), without, however, establishing the causal relationships between the model's categories.

Methods. Isolated case studies are the most commonly used method in the analyzed applications (50%), followed by documental research (21.7%) and questionnaires/surveys (10.9%). Combined methods such as case studies and participatory observation or documental research have been identified for 6.5% and 4.3% of the articles respectively. The predominance of the case study in ACF applications is justified, given that the proposed unit of analysis is the policy subsystem, which leads most researchers to a deeper analysis of a specific policy process.

Collection instruments. Documental research combined with interviews has been predominant (47.8%), followed by isolated documental research (21.7%). Other instruments were: questionnaires and interviews (6.5%), interviews, documental research and questionnaires (6.5%), interviews, documental research and participatory observation (4.3%) and isolated interviews (4.3%). In comparison with the last review, we can perceive the growth

of the use of interviews, which were present in 70% of the applications analyzed, while Pierce et al. (2017) already pointed out a doubling of their frequency from 30% to 63% in relation to the previous review. We also observed an appreciable growth in data collection through documental research, going from 58% (PIERCE et al., 2017) to 85%. The combined utilization of these two instruments went from 10% in Weible et al. (2009) to 40% in Pierce et al. (2017) and 59% in this review, confirming a trend in ACF applications.

Analysis techniques. Content analysis was used by most of the applications analyzed (73.9%), followed by descriptive statistics (13%), discourse analysis (6.5%) and inferential statistics (2.2%). One case, even though it cites the use of documents, does not specify the use of a specific analysis. In the case of intervention, the term “does not apply” was used. It is interesting to note in this review the new use of the ACF as a policy intervention. Kershaw, Swanson, & Stucchi (2017) demonstrate how a non-profit coalition without a party affiliation was created, and which resources and strategies were used to increase investments in social assistance to the younger generations of Canada. The intervention was delimited based on the premises of the ACF.

4.2. Theoretical Components Considered in these ACF Applications

In this section, we analyzed the categories related to the ACF's main theoretical components: coalitions, policy-oriented learning and policy change.

Theories and Models. The ACF was applied alone in 57% of the studies analyzed. This demonstrates the robustness of the analysis model for the policy process. Contrary to the previous reviews conducted by Pierce et al. (2017) and Weible et al. (2009), we observed in this review that none of the works combines the ACF with the policy cycle model. Its combined use was more often found in Institutional Theory approaches (9%), Stakeholder Analysis, Multiple Stream Framework and the Narrative Policy Framework, each representing 4% of the cases. Other theories and models have been found in just one study apiece, dealing with Ecology Policy, Cultural Theory, and Discourse Theory, among others.

Model elements. Among the ACF elements, the policy subsystem is the most utilized, appearing in all the analyses. In terms of coalitions, the studies identified between zero and five coalitions, with most identifying two (54%) or three (24%) coalitions. The others identified zero (7%), one (9%), four (7%) or five (2%) coalitions. Some studies did not specify the number of coalitions (11%). The presence of two coalitions has been the most common situation in studies that use the ACF ever since its formulation and is a result of the nature of the model itself. This has not prevented, however, its use in more fragmented policy subsystems.

In terms of beliefs, 45 articles (98%) identify coalition beliefs, but of these, just 6 (13%) identify beliefs on the three levels proposed by the model (deep core beliefs, policy core, and secondary aspects). The policy core beliefs have been used in all of them, with that being the

main element used to identify coalitions. This indicates that the belief system has not been used in the way in which the model proposed, which can be attributed to the difficulty in identifying deep core beliefs, as well as the difficulty in clearly separating the policy core from secondary aspects. Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith (1999) sought to remedy this difficulty which appeared during the model's first version, by incorporating a revised structure of belief systems and aspects related to each of the levels. Despite these authors had suggested the possibility of integrating these last two categories (JENKINS-SMITH et al., 2014), none of the analyzed works has pursued proposals in this direction.

The ACF envisions resources as one of the elements in analyzing coalitions. More than half of the studies (54%), however, do not analyze any of the resources proposed by the model, while 11% analyze all of them. The resources that appear more often are the position of authority (28%), public opinion (24%) and acquiring information (20%), followed by skillful leadership, mobilizable supporters and financial resources (4% apiece). The acquiring of technical and scientific information is one of the resources that the ACF is particularly interested in, because it can be used in various ways in policy debates, such as arguing against rival coalitions, convincing members of the government, or mobilizing public opinion. With this, the ACF includes researchers as actors of strategic importance to coalitions. In addition, Jenkins-Smith et al. (2014) suggest that these resources can be arranged hierarchically in relation to their utility and effectiveness, as perceived by coalitions. The work of Pierce (2016) presents some results that can contribute to efforts in this direction. The author performs a quantitative analysis to explore the relationship between resources and the strategies used by coalitions to change hydraulic fracturing policy in Colorado. Analyzing two competing coalitions, the author examines, among other things, how the losing coalition (pro-fracturing) had greater financial resources, and the winning coalition (anti-fracturing) had more public support. This study is a counterpoint to previous studies that argued that coalitions that have greater resources or access to authorities dictate the policy process. The last aspect observed in relation to coalitions was whether studies discuss their stability or actor defections. This theme is not covered by 85% of the studies, while 9% did identify coalitions being abandoned by actors and 6% verified their stability. The effort to understand the coalition structure and motives for defections or stability is also an aspect of the model that needs to be better explored according to Jenkins-Smith et al. (2014).

The second element that appears most often in these studies deals with external events, which are present in 72% of the articles. Even though most of the analyses confirm the influence of external events on policy change, there are studies that do not confirm this relationship. Menahem & Gilad (2016), for example, conclude that despite various external shocks during the 1990s, such as the unexpected migration of almost a million Soviet citizens to Israel as well as a series of droughts and water contamination events, Israel's water policy

remained unchanged, which permitted its excessive use and has resulted in a lack of fresh water in its reservoirs and the salinization and contamination of its natural reserves.

Stable parameters and the intermediate elements of the model are present in 22% and 13% of the studies respectively. Only four studies use all of the model's elements (9%), analyzing a variety of subjects: breastfeeding policy in Washington (STEINMAN et al., 2017), the privatization of water in Jakarta, Indonesia (LEONG, 2015), the prohibition of smoking shisha in public places in the Province of Kerman in Iran (KHAYATZADEH-MAHANI et al., 2017) and the use of police dogs in the fight against drug trafficking in New South Wales in Australia (HUGHES et al., 2017). These works all have in common the fact that they study policy on a state or local level, which can facilitate the use of the whole framework.

Policy Change. Understanding policy change is one of the ACF's main objectives. Changes are classified as major when they affect the policy core, and minor when they affect its secondary aspects. 43 articles (93%) identify some type of change. Of these 43, 18 identify major changes (42%), 11 identify minor changes (26%) and 14 do not specify a type of change (33%). Compared with the review by Pierce et al. (2017), which found the identification of the types of change in just 12% of its articles, the data indicates that this category has been better explored in more recent ACF applications. Among the 43 articles that identify some form of change, many also point out the pathways that lead to change. Just five articles (12%) do not analyze any of the paths listed by the model. 20 studies (47%) analyze external and internal events, thus making them the most often cited pathways to change, followed by policy-oriented learning, present in 10 analyses (23%). External or internal events analyzed in isolation represent 12% and 19% of the cases respectively. Only three studies (7%) consider all the pathways. It should be noted that pathways are also used to analyze stasis or a lack of policy change (KHAYATZADEH-MAHANI et al., 2017).

Policy-Oriented Learning. Most of the reviewed studies (70%), even when they identify some type of learning do not analyze the level in which they occur. Of the remaining 30%, learning on the coalition level is the most analyzed (43%), followed by learning on an individual level or between coalitions (21% apiece). Just 2 studies (14%) analyze learning on more than one level. Jenkins-Smith et al. (2014) encourage analysts to reexamine the concept of learning and its technical implications, placing emphasis on clearer concepts and measurements of the products of learning. An example of this route may be the study of Moyson (2017), who uses a quantitative approach to analyze the consistency of the learning of the actors involved in the process of liberalizing the railroad and electricity sectors in Belgium. She observes a negative relationship between a change in the belief system of the actors in relation to this policy and the consistency of learning.

5. The ACF in Latin America: Some Other Findings

The last review of the ACF did not find any application of this model in Latin America (PIERCE et al., 2017). This has led us to search for applications of the ACF in Portuguese and Spanish in SciELO database. The search was performed on July 9, 2018 without the application of filters to retrieve the maximum number of results. The search terms “*advocacy coalition*”, “*coalizões de defesa*” and “*coalición promotora*”, yielded 8 results. Four were theoretical articles that use the ACF in their references, and four were in fact applications of the ACF. Some considerations about the empirical studies are presented below. These articles were published between 2014 and 2018 and analyze policies in Brazil (SOUZA; SECCHI, 2014; VICENTE; CALMON; ARAÚJO, 2017), Uruguay (ZORRILLA, 2016) and Chile (CORTEZ; MAILLET, 2018). In Brazil, both articles focus on state policies. Souza and Secchi (2014) use the ACF to analyze the role of the local scientific community in the formulation of Science and Technology policy in the State of Santa Catarina. Vicente, Calmon, and Araújo (2017) analyze the process of institutional change within the context of zoning policy in the Federal District, using the ACF to identify coalitions and their influence on the policy change process. The other two works analyze national policies in Uruguay and Chile. Zorrilla (2016) analyzes the belief systems of coalitions to understand the obstacles to the design and implementation of secondary school educational policy. Cortez and Maillet (2018) analyze how the socio-environmental conflict associated with the Pascua Lama mining project has motivated a review of the Chilean glacier protection policy, demonstrating that the coalitions have transformed over time.

Our findings demonstrate that the ACF is still a model that has been little used in Latin America, but it is beginning to establish itself in this region. It should be observed that the review of Brazilian theses and dissertations performed by Capelari, et. al. (2015) found 23 applications of the ACF, but it appears that these have not been converted into published articles. It may be affirmed, therefore, that this model is becoming known among Latin American researchers. The study of public policies in Latin America is certainly fertile ground for the application of the ACF. Conflicts of interest in terms of the reduction of social inequalities, the exploitation of natural resources, agricultural production, state interventions, economic blocs, and the war against drug trafficking, among others, are complex issues that involve various policy making policies in these countries. The syncretism of liberal, statist, conservative, and progressive views in recently consolidated democracies in developing countries makes Latin America a privileged locus for the use of the ACF as an analytical model for policy processes. For now, just accompanying the results of the next few years will enable us to evaluate the advance of the use of the ACF in this part of the planet.

6. Conclusion

The ACF continues to be an analysis model for public policies that is used mainly in Europe and the United States, but its expansion to other continents such as Asia, Africa and Oceania even on a minor scale is reflected in English language publications. The use of the ACF in Latin America continues in obscurity in the international arena, given that there has not been a review of publications in Portuguese and Spanish. Our work seeks to fill this gap, presenting the use of the ACF in four Latin American studies during the past few years. Used mainly to analyze environmental and energy policies, the ACF has also been used to analyze less polarized sector policies such as Health and Education. These works contribute to the broadening of the understanding of the ACF as an analysis model for policies involving beliefs that are not characterized by extreme positions (pro and contra).

The identification of some type of policy change is widely explored in these works, being explained mainly by the subsystem's external or internal events. Policy-oriented learning however continues to be an underutilized element of the model. The founders of the model have called for the advance of theories and measures of learning on a personal level, within coalitions or between them (JENKINS-SMITH et al., 2014). Analyses on an organizational level, without considering the subsystem, are indicated by the 2014 agenda and they remain to be explored. The use of the ACF in comparative studies can be observed in a small portion of the works analyzed, but this is an effort that can offer contributions to the model. The comparisons made examine the behavior of similar subsystems in various countries within the same continent, as well as the reaction of national subsystems to changes on a global level. This type of comparison has been possible for environmental policies with intercontinental impacts. Jenkins-Smith et al. (2014) reinforce the importance of comparative studies, indicating that this is a gap that needs to be filled. In general, the research agenda proposed in 2014 is still current, and presents challenges and possibilities for researchers interested in the use of the ACF which remain unexplored. Given the breadth of the model, perhaps the biggest decision to be made is which angle should be taken. The utilization of the whole model favors the development of more descriptive studies, but the search for causal relationships between its elements may be viable, establishing a focus on specific parts of the model or reducing its scope to the organizational level. The challenge of establishing common approaches and its application to specific contexts remains. It is recommended that researchers try to find points of theoretical-methodological convergence which can generate complementary studies. This may be fruitful for researchers interested in policies within the same area and may lead to the possibility of sharing research designs and instruments and favor the development of comparative studies between different countries. Finally, we recommend the use of the ACF for Latin American researchers, given the current polarization that exists in its various policy subsystems, in investigating economic, social or environmental issues.

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