MOYSON Stéphane, Research fellow of the F.R.S. – FNRS
Centre Montesquieu d'études de l'action publique
Political Sciences Louvain-Europe Institute
Collège Jacques Leclercq ; Floor 02 ; Room B275

Université catholique de Louvain
Place Montesquieu, 1 boite 7
1348 Louvain-la-Neuve
Belgium

Tel : 00 32 10 47 84 95
Fax : 00 32 10 47 46 03
Web : http://www.uclouvain.be/stephane.moyson

Monday 16/05/2011

Paper prepared for the Canadian Political Science Association 83rd Annual Conference 2011

Law and public policy section

A contribution to the analysis of the causal processes between dynamic system events and policy change within the advocacy coalition framework: The individual conditions of policy-oriented learning

Work in progress, no citation without author's permission. Thank you

Introduction

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF: Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993, 1999; Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009) is a theory of the policy process, of which one of the prominent characteristics is to integrate the role of policy learning in the explanation of policy change. In the ACF, the basic unit of analysis is the subsystem or "a set of actors who are involved in dealing with a policy problem such as air pollution control, mental health, or energy". Individual and corporate actors are characterized by their belief system including axioms and values of general application (deep core beliefs), beliefs related to the policy problems within the subsystem which they are part of (policy core beliefs), and beliefs focusing on such or another secondary aspect of these policy problems (secondary beliefs). Policy change within subsystems may be minor – if only secondary aspects of the policies change – or major – if policy core aspects change. The alteration of the actors' beliefs (policy learning), alone, is only susceptible to lead to minor policy change. Major policy change, in contrast, requires an external shock to occur, according to the ACF. But not all system-level events, however, lead to major policy change. They can result in only minor policy change or in no policy change at all.

In this paper, I show why and how my research about the individual conditions of policy learning could contribute to a better elucidation of the linkages between system-level events and

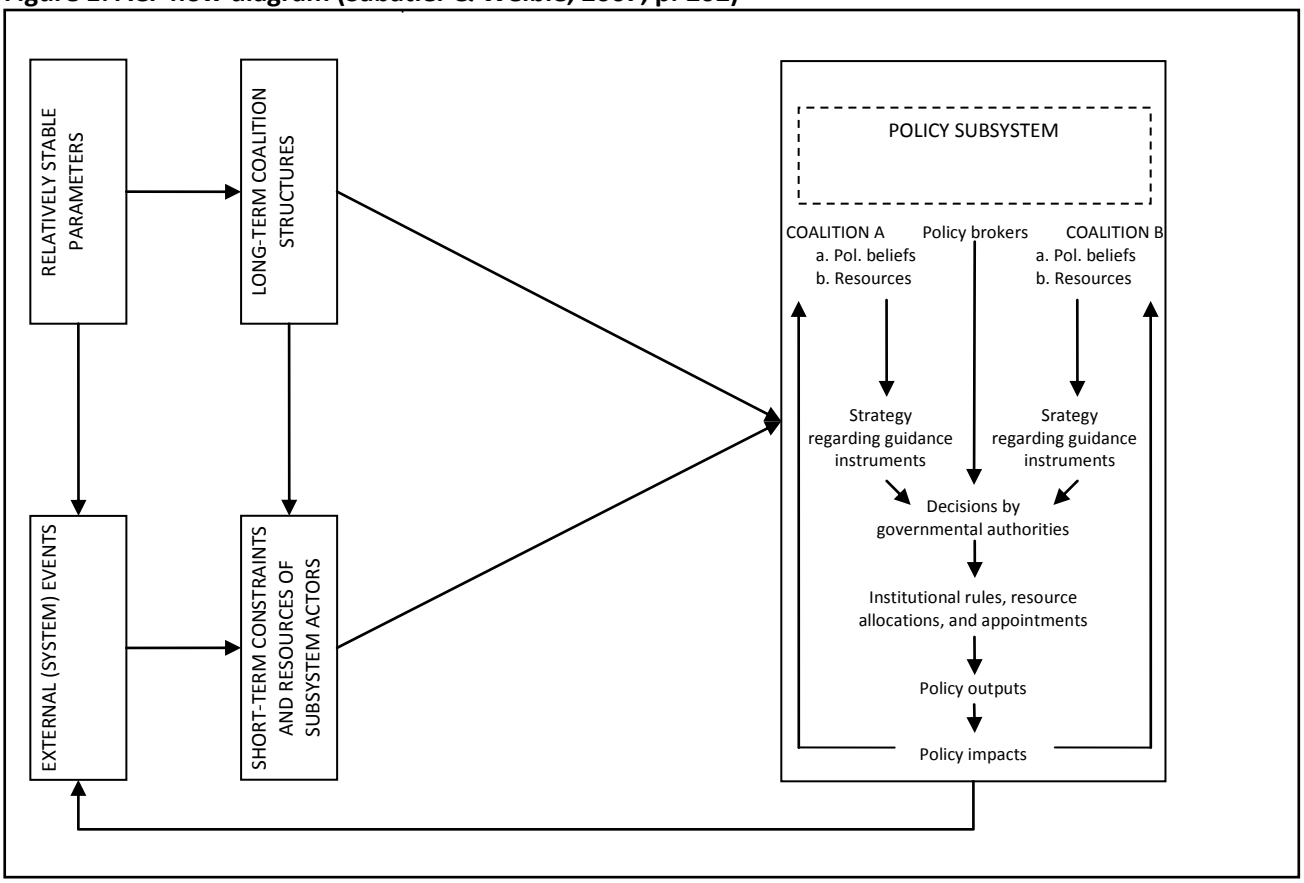
policy change in subsystems within the ACF. The objective of this paper is twofold. First, I would like to demonstrate how I intend to contribute to the development of the ACF with the study of the individual conditions of policy learning. Second, I would like to submit to the participants of the session some aspects of the analytical framework of my PhD research project before revision, development, and empirical implementation. I thank them very much for reading my paper and for their useful comments.

1. Conceptual overview of the Advocacy Coalition Framework

The ACF is a theory of the policy process, of which one of the prominent characteristics is to integrate the role of policy learning in the explanation of policy change[1]. The now-reputed flow diagram of the ACF outlines how the framework conceptualizes the policy process. This diagram appears in Figure 1. Basically, on the left appear the external factors that affect the constraints and opportunities of subsystem actors. In the subsystem, actors can be aggregated into a (often, small) number of opposing advocacy coalitions because they share common beliefs about the causes of the policy problem and about the norms that should guide its resolution. These actors act in concert and implement strategies by using their resources to influence the flow of decisions in the subsystem. The role of policy brokers is to compromise beliefs and strategies of conflicting coalitions to make decisions. These decisions have operational impacts on the policy problem which can lead the coalitions to revising their policy beliefs.

[1] Major revisions of the ACF occurred in Sabatier (1988), Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1994), Sabatier(1998), Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999), and Sabatier and Weible (2007). Recently, Weible, Sabatier, and McQueen (2009) have produced an in-depth review and analysis of ACF applications from 1987 to 2006.

Figure 1: ACF flow diagram (Sabatier & Weible, 2007, p. 202)



The policy subsystem is the basic functional unit of analysis in the ACF. A policy subsystem is defined as "a set of actors who are involved in dealing with a policy problem such as air pollution control, mental health, or energy" (Sabatier, 1993; Sabatier & Weible, 2007). The time unit of analysis in the ACF is "a decade or more" (Sabatier, 1993). It allows dealing with the (gradual) impact of policy-oriented learning and policy analysis on policy change (Sabatier, 1986, p. 39).

Among the external factors affecting policy making and change within subsystems, stable parameters can be distinguished from external shocks. Some parameters are stable over the course of a few years or a decade (up to 100 years: Weible & Sabatier, 2006). They affect the beliefs and resources of the subsystem actors and limit the range of alternatives available to the actors. They also structure the nature of the problem, establish the rules and procedures for changing policy and reaching collective decisions, and broadly frame the values that inform policymaking. They are difficult to change, in such a way that actors are discouraged to strategize behaviors to influence them (Sabatier, 1987; Weible & Sabatier, 2006). External shocks vary over the course of a few years or a decade. While being substantial, external shocks can vary very gradually. Dynamic system events are external shocks for policy subsystems when they alter the constraints and opportunities confronting subsystem actors. This is a permanent challenge for subsystem actors to anticipate and respond to them in a manner consistent with their basic beliefs

and interests. They can result in a turnover of personnel within the policy subsystem. External shocks can also open/close venues because they shift public attention (and thus resources) toward or away from a policy subsystem. Finally, external shocks are susceptible to change the policy beliefs of the dominant coalition (Sabatier, 1987, 1998; Weible & Sabatier, 2006). The effect of relatively stable parameters and external shocks on policy subsystems is mediated by two intermediate variables, in the ACF: the coalition opportunity structure, on the one hand, and the constraints and resources of subsystem actors, on the other hand. I will not provide further details about these variables here.

The concept of "advocacy coalition" results from the will of aggregating in a relevant unit of analysis the diverse actors belonging to one policy subsystem. An advocacy coalition is composed of "people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers, etc.) who share a particular belief system [(at the level of the *policy core*)] – that is, a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perception – and who show a nontrivial degree of *coordinated* activity over time" (Sabatier, 1993, p. 25). They aim at implementing their beliefs by influencing the content of governmental decisions (Sabatier, 1993; Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994) with guidance instruments and resources, concepts on which I will not provide further details here.

Individual and corporate subsystem actors are characterized by their belief system. A belief system is composed of cognitive and normative propositions. They are hierarchically classified in three strata, according to their scope and topics: deep core beliefs, policy core beliefs, and secondary beliefs. Deep core beliefs consist of ontological and normative axioms related to the nature of man, the relative priority of basic values, as well as the basic criteria of redistributive justice (topics). They have a potential influence on the policy beliefs of actors in any policy area (scope). Deep core beliefs of actors are very difficult to change; they are akin to a religious conversion (Sabatier, 1993; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). Policy core beliefs apply to virtually all aspects of policy within one subsystem (scope). They consist of the more concrete translation of fundamental axioms into precepts related to the priorities in the policy subsystem, or the identification of groups or other entities whose welfare is of greatest concern. They also relate to the seriousness and causes of the policy problem, the distribution of authority between market and (levels of) government, the priority accorded to various policy instruments, the ability of society to resolve the problem, or the responsibility of public versus experts (topics). Secondary beliefs apply to a part of the subsystem only (scope). They relate to the seriousness of specific aspects of the problem in specific locales and to the importance of various causal linkages in different locales and over time, as well as to administrative rules, budgetary allocations, disposition of cases, statutory interpretation, statutory revision, and information regarding performance of specific programs or institutions (topics) (Sabatier, 1993; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999).

According to the ACF, policy learning "involves relatively enduring alterations of thought or behavioral intentions that result from experience or new information and which are concerned with the attainment or revision of the precepts of the belief system of individuals or of collectivities (such as advocacy coalitions)" (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993, p. 42; Sabatier &

Jenkins-Smith, 1999, p. 123). Processes of policy learning include: “individual learning and attitudinal change; diffusion of new beliefs and attitudes among individuals; turnover in individuals within any collectivity; group dynamics, such as the polarization of homogeneous groups or groups in conflict; rules for aggregating preferences and for promoting (or impeding) communication among individuals” (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993, p. 42). There are three most important topics (outputs) involved by policy learning. The first topic consists of improving one’s understanding of the status of goals and other variables identified as important by one’s belief system. Of particular importance is monitoring the status of critical goals to see if they fall below acceptable levels, thereby indicating a performance gap” (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993, p. 42). The second topic of policy learning consists of “refining one’s understanding of logical and causal relationships internal to a belief system. This process typically focuses on the search for improved mechanisms to attain core values […] [But], although proponents will be loathe to reexamine core beliefs, experience and opponents’ activities may eventually force them to acknowledge erroneous assumptions or implicit goal contractions […] (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993, p. 43). The third topic of policy learning consists of “identifying and responding to challenges to one’s belief system. […] But every effort will be made to restrict change to the secondary aspects” (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993, pp. 42-43).

Policy change is what the ACF, *in fine*, tries to explain (Sabatier, 1986, p. 39). Policy change can be defined as “fluctuations in the dominant belief systems (i.e., those incorporated into public policy)” (Sabatier, 1987, p. 682). Policy change can be minor to major. Actors and coalitions strategize to maintain or to change policy in convergence with their policy core beliefs, in such a way to realize their deep core beliefs. In the same way, they militate to maintain or to change secondary aspects which implement their policy core beliefs. Given this, policy change and beliefs “can be analyzed in similar categories” (Sabatier, 1986, p. 42). Major policy change is change in the policy core aspects of a governmental program, whereas minor change is change in the secondary aspects. As beliefs are defined by their scope and topics, it is the same for major and minor policy change (Sabatier, 1998, p. 118). “Linking change to scope also makes it clear that the same change may be “minor” for one subsystem but “major” for a subsystem nested within it” (Sabatier, 1998, p. 118). Major alterations in the policy core will normally be the product of changes external to the subsystem – particularly large-scale socio-economic perturbations or changes in the systemwide governing coalition. The ACF argues that the core aspects of a governmental action program will typically remain rather stable over periods of a decade or more, in the absence of external shocks. Major policy changes are infrequent events. Minor policy changes “are often the result of policy learning by various coalitions or policy brokers” and are more frequent (Sabatier, 1986, pp. 42-43).

2. Linking external perturbations to changes in policy subsystems within the Advocacy Coalition Framewok

The role of external shocks is predominant on the other factors of policy change within the ACF. Indeed, according to the second of the three ACF hypotheses relating to policy change, "significant perturbations external to the subsystem (i.e. changes in socio-economic conditions, public opinion, system-wide governing coalitions, or policy outputs from other subsystems) are a necessary (but not sufficient) cause of change in the policy core attributes of a governmental program" (Sabatier, 1998, p. 106)[2]. From their review of 80 applications of the ACF, however, Weible, Sabatier, and McQueen (2009, p. 125; see also Sabatier & Weible, 2007) concluded that "questions remain on linking external perturbations to changes in policy subsystems".

About twenty studies have tested the second policy change hypothesis until now and most of them support it with several nuances. No hypothesis, however, suggests whether one type of external shock or another, in such a subsystem or another, will lead to policy changes or not. For example, why does the nuclear disaster of Fukushima seem to lead to policy changes in some countries (such as Germany) more than in other countries (such as France)? "The link between external events and policy change initiatives is more complex than a simple stimuli–response sequence. Events may stimulate policy change in a number of ways, although the specific dynamics vary from one case to another (Nice & Grosse, 2001; Hermann, 1990). While previous ACF studies have confirmed that external shocks are one prerequisite for major policy change, researchers need to pay more attention to the nature of the relationship" (Nohrstedt, 2005, p. 1047; Sabatier, 1993; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999; Weible, et al., 2009).

Linking external perturbations to changes in policy subsystems raises two categories of problems. The first category of problems relates to the relation between some particular types of system-level events with the occurrence and forms of policy change they are conducive to. Indeed, not all system-level events lead to policy change; not all system-level events are external shocks. Economies and public opinion have their up and down without systematically inducing policy changes. Policy outputs are constantly produced by many policy subsystems without provoking, in any case, a domino effect of policy change in all the other policy subsystems. In addition, the list of system-level events conducive to policy change (changes in socioeconomic conditions, in public opinion, of system-wide governing coalitions, or in policy outputs from other subsystems) identified by the ACF is, perhaps, too restrictive. "A more inclusive typology seems motivated to capture the wide range of accidents, disasters, crises, and other calamities that hit societies" (Nohrstedt, 2005, p. 1046).

The second category of problems raised by linking external perturbations to changes in policy subsystems relates to the conditions under which external shocks actually provoke major

[2] According to the first policy change hypothesis, the policy core in a specific jurisdiction will not be significantly revised as long as the subsystem advocacy coalition which initiated the program remains in power within that jurisdiction – except when the change is imposed by a hierarchically superior jurisdiction (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 217). According the third policy change hypothesis, even when the accumulation of technical information does not change the views of the opposing coalitions, it can have important impacts on policy – at least in the short term – by altering the views of policy brokers or other important governmental officials (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993, pp. 219-220).

policy change within subsystems[3]. These conditions are subsystem-level or individual-level. Indeed, not all system-level events, even if they act as external perturbations on policy subsystems, lead to major policy change in these subsystems: "alternatively, instead of major policy change, some researchers discuss changes in coalition structure or minor policy changes after an external shock (Burnett & Davis, 2002; Carvalho, 2001; Davis & Davis, 1988)" (Weible, et al., 2009, p. 128). That, according to the second policy change hypothesis, external shocks are a necessary *but not sufficient* condition of policy change already and prudently accounts for these conditions of policy change within subsystems: "the basic argument is that such perturbations provide an opportunity for major policy change, but that such change will not occur unless that opportunity is skillfully exploited by proponents of change, that is, the heretofore minority coalition(s)" (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999, p. 148). But it does not provide concrete knowledge about the conditions conducive to policy change after an external shock. Weible, Sabatier, and McQueen (2009, p. 128) draw three lessons of the past applications of the ACF:

> "First, the effects of external shocks cannot be understood in isolation from internal subsystem affairs. Second, there is much to learn about the intervening steps between an external perturbation and major policy change; third, changes in coalition membership, strategies, beliefs, and minor policy changes are among the other internal subsystem effects resulting from external perturbations".

According to Nohrstedt (Nohrstedt, 2005, pp. 1046-1047), external perturbations may lead to policy change in at least three ways, contingent on the conditions internal to subsystems:

> "First, events can be catalytic by working upon ideas that have been around for quite a while and accelerating their progress. Second, events can be creative by inventing some new ideas and making them popular (see Mueller, 1991). Third, events may be provoked by élite activity. For example, in the 1970s, public attitudes towards nuclear power in the US developed largely in response to élite conflict (Rankin, Stanley, & Melber, 1984)".

To conclude, two big questions can be asked with regard to the theoretical relation between dynamic system events and policy change within subsystems. First, which particular types of system-level events are susceptible or not to become, for policy subsystems, external shocks conducive to policy change? Second, what are the individual-level and subsystem-level conditions influencing the occurrence and nature of policy change within subsystems in the following of system-level events?

While exposing the basics of the analytical framework of my PhD research, I show below why and how it can contribute to the elucidation of the second question. One of the individual conditions of policy learning is the propensity on the part of the individual to take his or her self-interest into account when learning. I focus on this aspect of my analytical framework in the following section of this paper. According to this propensity, the opportunities and constraints created by external shocks in policy subsystems can be manipulated in very different ways by subsystem actors, with consequences for policy change.

[3] In addition to the short-term constraints and resources of subsystem actors already pointed by the ACF literature (see the Figure 1).

3. The role of self-interest in policy learning within the ACF

In ACF-based studies, there is a propensity to ignore the question of the self-interest of the actors whereas it is recognized that it is susceptible to influence significantly the course of public policies. More specifically, some studies criticize the ACF for overemphasizing learning and for discrediting the role of interests and strategic behaviors (Hoberg, 1996; Nohrstedt, 2005; Weible, et al., 2009). That "actors are driven by a set of policy oriented goals" and that they are not "primarily driven by simple goals of economic/political self-interest" is a "questionable assumption in the context of politics", according to Nohrstedt (2005, p. 1045). "Setting aside interests" prevents from rejecting "the null hypothesis that ideas [are] not relevant to the policy change", according to Hoberg (1996, p. 143). For these reasons, both researchers suggest to test the relevance of interests versus learning for explaining policy change.

From the beginning exists a certain ambiguity in the ACF core literature about the role that the framework attributes to the interests of the actors in explaining policy learning and change. At the roots of the ACF lies the focus on beliefs as a way to characterize the individual actor because beliefs are more "inclusive" than interests; beliefs comprise not only self-interest and organizational interests, but also quite different ways to establish goals, as a result of values, convictions, socialization, etc (Sabatier, 1993). In the 1999 version of the framework it is similarly ascertained that "actors are driven by a set of policy-oriented goals comprising value priorities and conceptions of whose welfare should be of greatest concern" (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999, p. 130). In 2007 it is recognized that some research still needs to be conducted on "the relative importance of individual and organizational welfare concern (material self-interest) compared with other policy core beliefs in coalition formation and maintenance" (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). These quotations seem to indicate that beliefs include the interests of the actors too.

When it comes to policy learning, however, the treatment of interests becomes more ambiguous. In fact, no major revision of the ACF makes explicit that interests are a variable influencing the course of the alterations of policy core beliefs. Excerpts of the ACF core literature like the following one tend to maintain doubts about the role of interests in policy learning:

> "One of the most influential aspects of the 1987-1988 version of the ACF was its contention that policy change is not simply the result of competition among various interests in which financial resources and institutional rules are critical, but that "policy-oriented learning" within and between coalitions is an important aspect of policy change" (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999, p. 145).

Probably as a consequence, some ACF applications come to ignore the influence of interests on policy learning. For example, in a reply to Lertzman, Rayner and Wilson (1996) who aim at putting forward the role of ideas and learning in policy change, Hoberg criticizes them because – according to him – they forget to test the *concurrent* hypothesis that policy change is guided by the interests of the actors. Following Hoberg, policy learning allows to examine the role of ideas in policy change in comparison to (and independently from) the role of interests:

> “Obviously, there is no conceptual or theoretical problem with arguing that one variable trumps another. The problem with the account, however, is that so little attention is paid to alternative explanations that a convincing argument for why learning is so important to the explanation is never offered. At one point, the authors make the following summary statement: "Obviously, learning by itself was not a sufficient condition for the changes that have taken place. But neither were external 'perturbations' " (Lertzman, et al., 1996, p. 125). But this conclusion is simply not supported by the analysis because the authors never provide an argument for why non-cognitive factors are not sufficient. A more persuasive strategy is adopted by Goldstein and Keohane in their attempt to test the influence of ideas. They argue that the best methodological approach is to test the null hypothesis that the policy change in question "is entirely accounted for by changes in factors other than ideas."" In what follows, I provide an alternativea ccounto f the developmentsd escribedb y the articlet hate m-phasizes an interest-baseda pproach,a nd seems to providea n extremely compelling argument for the extent of change in BC forest policy” (Hoberg, 1996, pp. 139-140).

From the following quotation it appears that Nohrstedt comes to the same conclusion (and criticizes this):

> “Sabatier and Jenkins (1993, p. 28) exclude interests from the ACF partly because they are too difficult to identify *a priori* and because they correlate with belief systems. The overly simple solution to this problem has been to incorporate interests into the beliefs systems concept, a solution that may in fact be counterproductive. By setting aside interests, no reason is provided to reject the null hypothesis that beliefs are not relevant to policy change (Hoberg, 1996, p. 143). Furthermore, the severity of the measurement problem can be questioned. While it may be true that interests are difficult to identify empirically, it is difficult to see why beliefs would be “more verifiable than interests” (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 28). Since beliefs too are associated with difficult measurement problems (Hann, 1995), refuting the role played by interests on methodological grounds is rather far-fetched” (Nohrstedt, 2005, pp. 1045-1046).

To remediate to this problem, researchers like Nohrstedt and Hoberg propose to re-introduce interests in the model of the individual, when examining policy learning.

My research will mobilize the literature on the role of self-interest in social and political attitudes to investigate the role of self-interest in policy learning. In their own major review of this literature, Sears and Funk (1991) concluded that an average correlation of only 0.07 exists between measures of self-interest and social and political attitudes. From this review and many subsequent studies results a general hypothesis that self-interest is largely irrelevant to explain most of these attitudes (Sears & Funk, 1991; cited by Darke & Chaiken, 2005).

The general hypothesis about the low influence of self-interest is not shared by all the researchers, however. In some specific circumstances, self-interest is susceptible to determine attitudes (Chong, Citrin, & Conley, 2001; see for example Martinussen, 2008). For this reason, in fact, “the question is not whether self-interest matters, but when it matters” (Chong, et al., 2001, p. 543). In addition, self-interest can come up against competition with concurrent values (symbolic politics) in influencing attitudes.

3.1. Self-interest and self-interested policy learning: Definition and operationalization

I adopt the definition of self-interest put forward by Sears and Funk (1991): "we define an individual's self-interest in a particular attitudinal position in terms of: *(1) its short to medium-term impact* on the *(2) material well-being* of the *(3) individual's own personal life* (or that of his or her immediate family)" (pp. 15-16). A self-interested fashion of learning about policies consists of treating new information and experience according to the extent to which it will serve one's self-interest. Learning self-interestedly also includes the development of this tendency, that is: resulting from self-interested policy learning, the individual will treat new information and experience according to his or her self-interest more than he or she would have done in the past. These two dimensions will be combined or analyzed separately.

I do *not* preclude that self-interest does not include organizational interests; they can overlap or, in the case an individual is devoted to his or her organization, quite perfectly correspond upon each other. This depends upon the subjective perception of his or her self-interest's content on the part of the individual.

I will adopt a subjective approach of self-interested policy learning. The propensity to learn about public policies self-interestedly requires two steps to be (subjectively) measured. In a first step, the respondent has to identify the beliefs which, he or she thinks, are favourable (or not) to his or her self-interest. The second step consists of measuring the degree of support for these beliefs on the part of the respondent. Some questions will have to be answered to elaborate the questionnaire. Is it more appropriate, in the first step, to let the respondent defining these beliefs freely or to ask him or her whether such a belief or another, among a set of beliefs defined by the researcher, is or not favourable to his or her self-interest? Should one of these two methodological alternatives be chosen or is a combination of the two alternatives the best way to define the beliefs that the actor perceives as favourable to his or her self-interest? In case the beliefs are defined by the researcher and submitted to the respondent, what should be the submission order of the steps in the questionnaire? Does this way of doing meets the critique of Hoberg (1996) and Nohrstedt (2005) that the influence of interests must be ascertained in comparison with the influence of the other beliefs of the actors and has this critique to be met here? Etc.

3.2. Selfishness and self-interested policy learning

Selfishness, this trait which consists of repeatedly putting one's needs, interests or desires ahead of others what about one's short to medium-term material well-being, is supposed to be the basic individual determinant of the propensity to learn self-interestedly about public policies. As suggested by Sears and Funk (1991), "if hedonic needs similarly affect social and political attitudes, we could expect to find people forming policy preferences and candidate evaluations on the basis of how they will personally be affected by the policy or the candidate's actions. Those which benefit the self should be favoured and those which hurt the self should be opposed" (p. 6). When transferred to the field of policy learning, I hypothesize that the propensity to take into account his

or her self-interest when learning, on the part of the actor, is positively related to his or her degree of selfishness.

3.3. Moderators of the influence of self-interest

One possible explanation for the low to insignificant propensity of individuals to adopt self-interested social and political attitudes is a low to insignificant level of selfishness. Two alternative explanations are possible. First, if individuals show a strong tendency to be selfish, however, another possible explanation for the low influence of selfishness on social and political attitudes is that a series of mediator variables are not strongly enough present for selfishness to influence attitudes. Inversely it can be the case that a series of variables moderating the influence of selfishness on attitudes are too omnipresent to allow this influence to produce its effects. In both cases it is necessary to assess the role of a third variable on the relation between the independent variable – selfishness – and the dependent variable – self-interested attitudes.

A seminal article in the field of psychology about the moderator and mediator functions of variables was written by Baron and Kenny (1986). The moderator function of a variable "partitions a focal independent variable into subgroups that establish its domains of maximum effectiveness in regard to a given dependent variable" (Baron & Kenny, 1986, p. 1173). It affects the direction and/or strength of this relation. The mediator function of a variable "represents the generative mechanism through which the focal independent variable is able to influence the dependent variable of interest" (Baron & Kenny, 1986, p. 1173). Integrated models and methods have been proposed to conjointly examining the effects of moderator and mediator variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Holmbeck, 1997). Examples among other ones of the application of these models and methods include a research by Quittner and his colleagues (Quittner, 1992; Quittner, Glueckauf, & Jackson, 1990) as well as a study by Civitci and Civitci (2009).

Possible moderators/mediators of the influence of selfishness on policy learning include the costs-benefits calculus about the stakes – if an individual does not perceive benefits or costs related to the final policy change, there is no reason to look after his or her self-interest in the process of policy learning. For example, there exist survey indicators that the support the people accord to a tax reform is positively correlated to the impact that this reform is susceptible to have on their self-interest (Sears & Citrin, 1985). Other possible moderators/mediators of the influence of selfishness on policy learning include the perceived importance of the stakes, the information provided about the stakes, the role of political sophistication, and the role of emotions. They are detailed in the full version of the analytical framework of my research.

3.4. The role of symbolic politics

It is possible to divide the determinants of political and social attitudes into three conceptually distinct groups: early learned symbolic attitudes, background/demographic variables,

and self-interest (Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980; cited by Lau & Heldman, 2009). *A priori*, background/demographic variables will be included in control variables.

The symbolic politics approach tries to capture "learned affective responses to particular symbols relatively early in life" (Sears & Funk, 1991). These responses flow from formative experiences in the childhood or early adulthood. They are durable throughout the adulthood and influence individual socio-political attitudes. Those of these learned affective responses which are the most durable and the most strongly influence socio-political attitudes are called "symbolic predispositions". The nature of these responses conditions the attitudes adopted by individuals confronted to the specific symbols included in the attitude objects. The process involved in the theories of symbolic politics is one of transfer: a transfer of affects from one symbol to another (Lorge & Curtiss, 1936; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955; cited by Sears & Funk, 1991).

These basic ideas have undergirded research on a wide variety of problems. Research on political socialization has investigated children's and adolescents' early learning of attitudes toward such symbols as the flag, the President, stigmatized racial groups, and the political parties. Such early learning presumably yields such standing predispositions as party identification, racial prejudices, ethnic identities, basic values, nationalism, and attachment to various symbols of the nation and regime (e.g., Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Easton & Dennis, 1969; Jennings & Niemi, 1981). The persistence of these predispositions has been investigated as a variable in its own right (see Alwin & Krosnick, 1988; Converse, 1975; Sears, 1983).

The activation of these predispositions by political symbols in the adult's environment, and their influence over attitudes toward such symbols, have received even more research attention. Longstanding partisan predispositions or basic values are activated by policy and candidate alternatives, thereby influencing the individual's preferences (Campbell, et al., 1960; Feldman, 1988; Sears, et al., 1980). Racial predispositions are activated by black candidates and racial issues, and influence attitudes toward them (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears, Hensler, & Speer, 1979). Other basic values can be activated by symbols such as injustice, inequity, or immorality, and thus produce mass protest (Gusfield, 1963; Sears & Citrin, 1985; Sears & McConahay, 1981). Longstanding antagonisms toward such groups as the Communists, Nazi party, and Ku Klux Klan are evoked by debates about their rights, and influence support for extending civil liberties to them (Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982).

As a general hypothesis about the role of symbolic politics in social and political attitudes, one can posit that their effect should be stronger than self-interest. First, the effect of symbolic attitudes is at least equivalent and is probably stronger than self-interest, given that the effect of self-interest is insignificant. Second is the idea that political symbols more spontaneously activate relevant and accessible social, collective constructs than self-constructs, such as self-interest. Indeed, there is an intensive coding activity of the public sphere on the part of communicators such as journalists, and much more politicians. "Their principal goal is to code political symbols in terms that will evoke widespread and supportive predispositions in the citizenry. To do this they use abstract symbols ("welfare", "crime in the streets", "patriotic", "busing", "Watergate", or

"Vietnam"). Such processes result in an informational environment that itself is coded in terms of abstractions corresponding to the social constructs most common among attentive ordinary citizens" (Sears & Funk, 1991, p. 14). By Contrast, politicians do not help citizens to code private sphere as much. As a consequence, private symbolic sphere remains more proximal, complex, and individualized, which renders the generalization of abstract self-constructs more difficult. These constructs are then less accessible. And, given that social symbolic constructs are more accessible, their influence on socio-political attitudes is more automatic than the influence of self symbolic constructs, such as self-interest, which remain less accessible.

By contrast, it is suggested by the literature (Hunt, Kim, Borgida, & Chaiken, 2010) that temporal perspective should influence the explanatory power of self-interest and symbolic politics in favour of the first. Construal Level Theory (CLT: Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2000, 2003) argues that "concrete, low-level construals more strongly influence judgments made in the context of the immediate future, whereas abstract high-level construals more strongly influence judgments made in the context of the distant future" (Hunt, et al., 2010, p. 155):

> "CLT argues that psychological distance affects the way people cognitively represent an object or event (Liberman, et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2003). People form higher-level, more abstract and schematic (high construal) representations of psychologically distant objects or events and concrete, detailed representations of psychologically near objects or events (Liberman, et al., 2007). According to CLT, people can construe the same piece of information at high or low levels as a function of psychological distance (usually time), and this can affect their preferences and attitude bases. Higher-level construals should exert greater influence on judgments regarding information in the distant future, whereas low-level construals should exert greater influence on judgments in the immediate future (Trope & Liberman, 2003) . When thinking about whether to support a new school bond that would go into effect in five years, for example, a person might consider more abstract issues such as the bond's educational direction and/or its potential impact on academic achievement. When thinking about supporting the same school bond in the immediate future, one might be more likely to consider the personal financial "hit" of a tax increase" (Hunt, et al., 2010, p. 1156).

Hunt *et al.* (2010) translate these findings to the field of social and political attitudes and suggest that values from symbolic politics, as they consist of high-level, abstract construals, more strongly influence distant attitudinal objects while self-interest, because it consists of a low-level, concrete construal, more strongly influences nearest attitudinal objects. Self-interest is also commonly defined in terms of the immediacy of the impacts on the material well-being of the individual's own personal life among the literature (Chong, et al., 2001; Hunt, et al., 2010; Sears & Funk, 1991). For this reason, too, it should be more sensible to events that are susceptible to produce direct consequences than to distant attitudinal objects. Hunt *et al.* (2010) provide empirical evidence supporting this hypothesis.

In mainstream research on self-interest and symbolic politics, selfishness and early learned symbolic motives are opposed to each other for explaining general attitudes. In my own research,

they are opposed for explaining self-interested attitudes and, in particular, self-interested policy learning. Of importance should be their degree of redundancy and their respective, autonomous power in the explanation of self-interested attitudes.

3.5. Graphical representation of the model of analysis

The Figure 2 shows how I intend to integrate my PhD research within the ACF flow diagram (cf. dotted lines; external factors are grouped within one unique rectangle). The Figure 3 presents the structure of the model of analysis introduced in the previous sections. Control variables have not been described in this paper.

Figure 2: Introduction of my PhD research within the ACF flow diagram

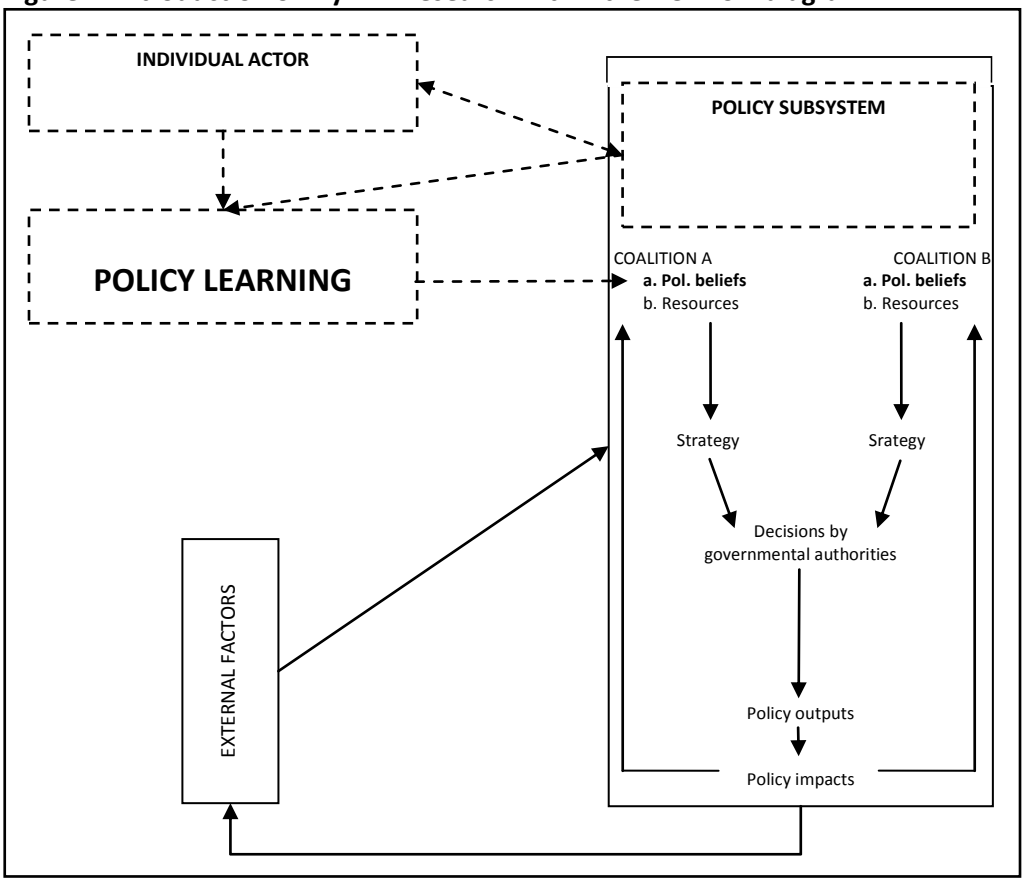
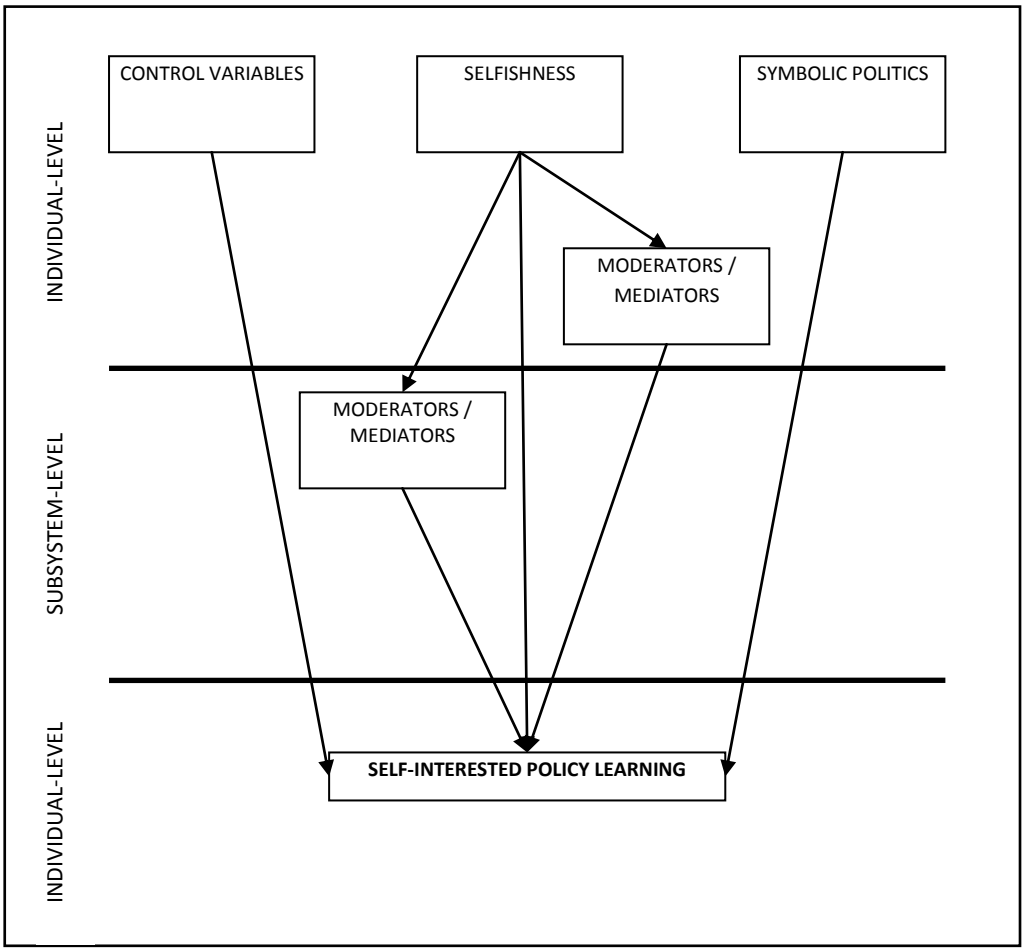


Figure 3: Structure of the model of analysis



Conclusion: A contribution to the analysis of the causal processes between system-level events and policy change within subsystems in the advocacy coalition framework

My PhD research focuses on the role of self-interest in policy learning on the part of the individual actors. Given the propensity of actors to take into account their self-interest when learning, major, minor, or no policy change can occur in the following of external shocks. Self-interest can play a more or less important role in individual policy learning depending upon whether the individual is more or less selfish. The influence of selfishness on policy learning is moderated/mediated by several factors at the individual or subsystem level. It is completed with the influence of symbolic politics on the judgment of actors.

Not all system-level events, even if they act as an external shock on a policy subsystem, lead to major policy change within this subsystem. Individual-level and subsystem-level conditions of policy change have an influence on the relation between external shocks and policy change. Among other things, the analysis of the individual factors and subsystem-level circumstances which lead an individual to learn more or less self-interestedly about policies, which can have an impact

on the course of policy change within subsystems, should contribute to a better understanding of the causal processes between external shocks and policy change within the ACF.

References

Alwin, D. F., & Krosnick, J. A. (1988). *Aging, cohorts, and change in political orientation: Exploring the aing-attitude stability relationship*. Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology, Secaucus, NJ.

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*(6), 1173-1182.

Burnett, M., & Davis, C. (2002). Getting out the cut: Politics and national forest timber harvests, 1960-1995. *Administration and Society, 34*(2), 202-228.

Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1960). *The American voter*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Carvalho, G. O. (2001). Metallurgical development in the Caraja´s area: A case study of the evolution of environmental policy formation in Brazil. *Society & Natural Resources: An International Journal, 14*(2), 127-143.

Chong, D., Citrin, J., & Conley, P. (2001). When self-interest matters. [Article]. *Political Psychology, 22*(3), 541-570.

Civitci, N., & Civitci, A. (2009). Self-esteem as mediator and moderator of the relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction in adolescents. [Review]. *Personality and Individual Differences, 47*(8), 954-958.

Converse, P. E. (1975). Public opinion and voting behavior. In F. I. Greenstein & N. W. Polsby (Eds.), *Handbook of political science* (Vol. 4, pp. 75-170). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Darke, P. R., & Chaiken, S. (2005). The pursuit of self-interest: Self-interest bias in attitude judgment and persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 89*(6), 864-883.

Davis, C., & Davis, S. (1988). Analyzing change in public lands policymaking: From subsystems to advocacy coalitions. *Policy Studies Journal, 17*(1), 3-24.

Easton, D., & Dennis, J. (1969). *Children in the political system: Origins of political legitimacy*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Feldman, S. (1988). Structure and consistency in public opinion: The role of core beliefs and values. *American Journal of Political Science, 32*(2), 416-440.

Gusfield, J. R. (1963). *Symbolic crusade*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Hann, A. (1995). Sharpening up Sabatier: belief systems and public policy. *Politics, 15*(1), 19-26.

Hermann, C. (1990). Changing course: When governments choose to redirect foreign policy. *International Studies Quarterly, 34*(2), 3-21.

Hoberg, G. (1996). Putting ideas in their place: a response to "learning and change in the British Columbia forest policy sector". *Canadian Journal of Political Science, 26*(1), 135-144.

Holmbeck, G. N. (1997). Toward terminological, conceptual, and statistical clarity in the study of mediators and moderators: Examples from the child-clinical and pediatric psychology literature. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 65*(4), 599-610.

Hunt, C. V., Kim, A., Borgida, E., & Chaiken, S. (2010). Revisiting the self-interest versus values debate: The role of temporal perspective. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 46*(6), 1155-1158.

Jenkins-Smith, H. C., & Sabatier, P. A. (1993). The dynamics of policy-oriented learning. In P. A. Sabatier & H. C. Jenkins-Smith (Eds.), *Policy change and learning. An advocacy coalition approach* (pp. 41-56). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Jenkins-Smith, H. C., & Sabatier, P. A. (1994). Evaluating the advocacy coalition framework. *Journal of Public Policy, 14*(2), 175-203.

Jennings, M. K., & Niemi, R. G. (1981). *Generations and politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kinder, D. R., & Sears, D. O. (1981). Prejudice and politics: Symbolic racism versus racial threats to the good life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 40*(3), 414-431.

Lau, R. R., & Heldman, C. (2009). Self-interest, symbolic attitudes, and support for public policy: A multilevel analysis. *Political Psychology, 30*(4), 513-537.

Lertzman, K., Rayner, J., & Wilson, J. (1996). On the place of ideas: A reply to George Hoberg. *Canadian Journal of Political Science, 29*(1), 145-148.

Liberman, N., Trope, Y., & Stephan, E. (2007). Psychological distance. In A. W. Kruglanski & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (Vol. 2, pp. 353-383). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Lorge, I., & Curtiss, C. C. (1936). Prestige, suggestion, and attitudes. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 7*(4), 386 - 402.

Martinussen, P. E. (2008). Self-interest or ideology? The attitude of Norwegian medical specialists towards private welfare services. *Scandinavian Political Studies, 31*(2), 149-172.

Mueller, J. (1991). Changing attitudes towards war: The impact of the First World War. *British Journal of Political Science, 21*(1), 1-28.

Nice, D., & Grosse, A. (2001). Crisis policy making: Some implications for program management. In A. Farazmand (Ed.), *Handbook of crisis and emergency management*. New York: Marcel Dekker, Inc.

Nohrstedt, D. (2005). External shocks and policy change: Three Mile Island and Swedish nuclear energy policy. *Journal of European Public Policy, 12*(6), 1041-1059.

Osgood, C. E., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1955). The principle of congruity in the prediction of attitude change. *Psychological Review, 62*(1), 42-55.

Quittner, A. L. (1992). Re-examining research on stress and social support: The importance of contextual factors. In A. M. La Greca, L. J. Siegel, J. L. Wallander & C. E. Walker (Eds.), *Stress and coping in child health* (pp. 85-115). New York, NY: Guilford.

Quittner, A. L., Glueckauf, R. L., & Jackson, D. N. (1990). Chronic parenting stress: Moderating versus mediating effects of social support. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*(6), 1266-1278.

Rankin, W., Stanley, N., & Melber, B. D. (1984). Overview of national attitudes toward nuclear energy: A longitudinal study. In W. Freudenberg & E. Rosa (Eds.), *Public reaction to nuclear power: Are there critical masses?* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Sabatier, P. A. (1986). Top-down and bottom-up approaches to implementation research: A critical analysis and suggested synthesis. *Journal of Public Policy, 6*(01), 21-48.

Sabatier, P. A. (1987). Knowledge, policy-oriented learning, and policy change. *Science Communication, 8*(4), 649-692.

Sabatier, P. A. (1988). An advocacy coalition framework of policy change and the role of policy-oriented learning therein. *Policy Sciences, 21*(2-3), 129-168.

Sabatier, P. A. (1993). Policy change over a decade or more. In P. A. Sabatier & H. C. Jenkins-Smith (Eds.), *Policy change and learning. An advocacy coalition approach* (pp. 13-39). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Sabatier, P. A. (1998). The advocacy coalition framework: Revisions and relevance for Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy, 5*(1), 98-130.

Sabatier, P. A., & Jenkins-Smith, H. C. (1999). The advocacy coalition framework: An assessment. In P. A. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 117-165). Boulder, CO/Oxford, United Kingdom: Westview Press.

Sabatier, P. A., & Jenkins-Smith, H. C. (Eds.). (1993). *Policy change and learning: An advocacy coalition approach*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Sabatier, P. A., & Weible, C. M. (2007). The advocacy coalition framework: Innovations and clarifications. In P. A. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 189-222). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Sears, D. O. (1983). The persistence of early political predispositions: The roles of attitude object and life stage. In L. Wheeler & P. Shaver (Eds.), *Review of personality and social psychology* (Vol. 4, pp. 79-116). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Sears, D. O., & Citrin, J. (1985). *Tax revolt: something for nothing in California* (enlarged ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sears, D. O., & Funk, C. L. (1991). The role of self-interest in social and political attitudes. In P. Z. Mark (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. Volume 24, pp. 1-91): Academic Press.

Sears, D. O., Hensler, C. P., & Speer, L. K. (1979). Whites' opposition to "busing": Self-Interest or symbolic politics? *The American Political Science Review, 73*(2), 369-384.

Sears, D. O., Lau, R. R., Tyler, T. R., & Allen, H. M. J. (1980). Self-interest vs. symbolic politics in policy attitudes and presidential voting. *American Political Science Review, 74*(3), 670-684.

Sears, D. O., & McConahay, J. B. (1981). *The politics of violence: The new urban blacks and the Watts riot*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Sullivan, J. L., Piereson, J., & Marcus, G. E. (1982). *Political tolerance and American democracy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2000). Temporal construal and time-dependent changes in preference. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*(6), 876-889.

Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2003). Temporal construal. *Psychological Review, 110*(3), 403-421.

Weible, C. M., & Sabatier, P. A. (2006). A guide to the advocacy coalition framework. Tips for researchers. In F. Fischer, G. J. Miller & M. S. Sidney (Eds.), *Hankbook of public policy analysis: Theory, politics, and methods* (pp. 123-136). New York: CRC Press.

Weible, C. M., Sabatier, P. A., & McQueen, K. (2009). Themes and variations: Taking stock of the advocacy coalition framework. *Policy Studies Journal, 37*(1), 121-140.