Instrument Constituencies and the Advocacy Coalition Framework: an essay on the comparisons, opportunities, and intersections

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this essay is to analyze two theories. One is a relatively new approach called Instrument Constituencies. The other is an established approach called the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). This essay begins by comparing the two theories by an explicit set of criteria. It then lays out opportunities for refinement and advancement of Instrument Constituencies towards its better placement, usefulness, and longevity as a policy process theory. Research prospects at the intersection of Instrument Constituencies and the ACF are then presented with a set of research questions and hypotheses. This essay concludes with a summary of insights about the field of policy processes gained from this theoretical exploration. While there are opportunities for improvements and important caveats for consideration, this essay makes an optimistic argument for the potential of Instrument Constituencies to offer generalizable and context-specific knowledge in helping to advance policy process research.

Introduction

All governments decide to take deliberate action on some matters and not on others, both of which are termed public policies. Such public policies lie at the fulcrum of an on-going policy process that entail interactions among people in a context affected by regular and sporadic events. Research on the policy process comes in many forms and purposes. It can focus on political behaviors of individual citizens, organizations, and coalitions. It can examine the adoption of public policies as well as answer questions about agenda setting and implementation. It can advance scholarship at the nexus of policy and politics and yet maintain practical relevance by seeking to better the human condition. On the whole, policy process research is multifaceted and approachable from multiple perspectives.

The multiple perspectives of policy process research usually come in the form of various approaches, models, theories, and frameworks. This essay uses ‘theories’ in the generic sense...
to denote those perspectives adopted and developed by scholars that involve the interrelations of concepts in describing and explaining various outputs or outcomes in a context for a particular policy-related phenomenon. From its beginning, theories have populated policy process research, from Lasswell’s Policy Sciences Framework to Hofferbert’s Funnel of Causality to Lowi’s Policy Typology (Hofferbert, 1974; Lasswell, 1971; Lowi, 1972). Indeed, if there were a continuous pattern in the scholarship of policy process research, it would be the constancy of theories that have been created, applied, and usually and eventually forgotten, subsumed, or replaced.

Although efforts to develop theories is a trademark of policy process research, there has been a recent proliferation in the number and diversity of theories. The roots of this proliferation can only be speculated but likely emerged from the increasing number of policy process scholars, the increasing contextual diversity being studied, the growing stable of tools for data collection and analysis, and the expanding substantive topics being studied. For policy process scholars, this proliferation results in a renewed need to somehow comprehend the field. Now, more than ever before, concerted efforts must be taken to compare and contrast theories to encourage dialog among scholars. Without such dialog, scholars will waste resources in recreating innovations, fail to learn from others’ mistakes, and miss opportunities to build onto others’ successes.

The purpose of this essay is to contribute to such dialogs by analyzing two theories. One is a new approach called Instrument Constituencies (IC). Although recently established by Voß and Simons (2014), IC is rooted in earlier publications (e.g. Voß, 2007) and is anchored in part by the policy instrument literature (e.g. Linder & Peters, 1989). The IC has also received recent attention among policy scholars (Béland & Howlett, 2016; Mann & Simons, 2015; Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015). The other is an established approach called the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). The ACF was originally created by Sabatier (1988) and Hank Jenkins-Smith with published empirical applications spanning the globe and with a series of theoretical revisions and refinements overtime (Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Weible, & Sabatier, 2014).

In analyzing these two theories, this essay is partitioned into four parts. The first part is a direct comparison of the two theories organized by an explicit set of criteria. The source materials relied upon for this comparison are primarily Voß and Simons (2014) and Jenkins-Smith et al. (2014), the two most recent overviews of the two theories written by at least some of the founders. The second describes opportunities for refinement and advancement of IC towards its better placement, usefulness, and longevity as a policy process theory. The third part provides ideas for research integration at the intersection of IC and the ACF through research questions and hypotheses. The fourth part reflects on the field of policy process research by summarizing insights learned from this exploratory essay.

Part 1: complementary differences of Instrument Constituencies and the Advocacy Coalition Framework

As established theories develop and new theories emerge, comparisons within and between them help scholars make sense of the constantly evolving study of policy processes. This

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1This essay does not provide general overviews of the ACF or IC; readers wanting overviews of these two perspectives are directed to Voß and Simons (2014) and Jenkins-Smith et al. (2014).

2This essay emphasizes IC because it is relatively new and gaining attention.
| Scope | Advocacy coalition framework | Instrument constituencies |
|-------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
|       | The formation, maintenance, and composition of advocacy coalitions, the processes and products of policy-oriented learning, and explanations of policy change | The emergence, development and establishment along the innovation journey of policy instruments |
| Unit of Analysis | A policy subsystem defined by a topical area, geographic scope, and active policy actors | A policy instrument and the related social entities |
| Model of the Individual | Boundedly rational, driven by beliefs, susceptible to biased assimilation and the 'devil shift' | Not explicitly specified, assumed boundedly rational motivated to advocate for policy instruments along the innovation journey |
| Assumptions | A central role of scientific and technical information, 10-year perspective to understand policy processes, and public policies as translations of beliefs; the basic collective unit is advocacy coalitions | Policy instruments understood by their innovation journey, policy instruments not distinct from social entities, and a central role of supplying policy instruments; the basic collective unit is instrument constituencies |
| Hypotheses | Several established hypotheses involving coalitions, learning, and policy change | Hypotheses articulated |
| Archetypical Depiction of the Policy Process | Advocacy coalitions motivated by beliefs and fomented by the devil shift coordinate their behavior to influence public policy with limited cross coalition learning and plenty within coalition learning; policy changes mostly about minor changes and less about major changes to follow internal or external events, learning, negotiations, or changes in a governing coalition | The innovation journey of a policy instrument begins with a kernel of an idea that is nurtured by social entities from its initiation into a model whereby it is then adopted and implemented into policies across different jurisdictions and accepted among the menu of policy instruments for government decision-making |
| Practical Lessons | Directs policy actors to long-term involvement in policy processes, the recognition of the endurance of political conflicts, the need for coalitions, the political uses of information, and the challenges of changing public policies | Directs social entities towards long-term involvement in the promotion of policy instruments, the recognition that influence is not dependent upon specific jurisdictional involvement but rather can be instrument-oriented, and the need for interpersonal networks |
| Implications for citizenship and democratic societies | Raises questions about representation, demonization, access to agenda setting, political equality in engagement, and unlikelihood of political compromise | Raises questions about subtle forms of power in shaping menus of policy instruments, outsider representation in policy processes, political equality in engagement, access to agenda setting |
essay compares the ACF and IC based on the following criteria: scope, unit of analysis, model of the individual, assumptions, hypotheses, the archetypical depiction of the policy process, practical lessons, and implications for citizenship and democratic societies. A summary of the criteria and summaries by them for the ACF and IC can be found in Table 1.

The first criterion is scope, which is the functional purpose and the set of typical questions asked of a theory. For the ACF, the functional purpose is to help understand and explain contentious policy issues. Typical questions asked under the ACF center on coalitions, learning, and policy change. The following are examples of these questions: Why do policy actors form and maintain coalitions over time? To what extent is there learning within and between coalitions? What factors explain major and minor policy change? For IC, the functional purpose is to understand and explain the innovation journey of a policy instrument. A sample of questions that could be asked under IC traverse this innovation journey, such as what spurred the creation of a policy instrument, how does a policy instrument develop and evolve over time, and why are some policy instruments implemented as public policies and others not?

The second criterion is the model of the individual. Articulating a clear model of the individual is essential for understanding human agency and for explaining the presumed causal drivers of change for a phenomenon (Jones, 2001; Ostrom, 2005; Sabatier, 1999). Indeed, given humans are the principal source and target of change in policy processes, leaving them as a ‘black box’ of decision-making severely dampens any theory’s potential for valid descriptions and explanations as well as for valued interventions to improve the human condition. For the ACF, policy actors are assumed to be boundedly rational (goal oriented but cognitively limited), motivated by a belief system in steering their political behavior and informing their support for public policy solutions, and susceptible to exaggerating the maliciousness and power of their political opponents, which is an individual-level condition called the ‘devil shift’. This model of the individual within the ACF has been documented in various ways and extents as a source of the longstanding conflicts over public policy issues. At this point in time, the IC does not explicitly articulate a model of the individual. The individual in IC is assumed to be boundedly rational with motivations to promote policy instruments along their innovation journeys. As is discussed later in this essay, developing a model of the individual is an essential next step for IC.

The principal unit of analysis is the third criterion. The unit of analysis is the entity within which a study occurs and for which generalizations from such studies are directed. For the ACF, the unit of analysis is the policy subsystem. A policy subsystem exists within a political system and is defined by a geographic scope, a topical area, and policy actors. Studies guided by the ACF are usually place based at local, sub-national, national, or international levels emphasizing policy actors engaged with a policy topic. In IC, the unit of analysis is the policy

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3These criteria are based on similar criteria used in my PhD seminars on public policy. Similar criteria can be found in Cairney and Heikkila (2014).
4Of course, applications can be, and at times theories should be, applied beyond their traditional scope. See Weible (2014) for a discussion.
5In the ACF, policy actors are defined as those individuals from inside or outside of government who directly or indirectly influence policy subsystem affairs.
6See Weible and Nohrstedt (2012) for a more complete question list.
7Voß and Simons (2014) define the innovation journey of a policy instrument as ‘a course that often starts from vague design notions and tentative practices and sometimes ends with dominant models, which are taken up in a global policy toolboxes’ (p. 736).
8See Sabatier (1999), p. 268) for a discussion.
instrument. In this respect, IC studies focus on the idea that originally formed the policy instrument and then trace the development of the policy instrument overtime through its innovation journey, possibly across different political systems or, using ACF lingo, across different policy subsystems. There are multiple definitions of the ‘policy process’ in policy process research. All of them use one or more public policies as the fulcrum around which the ‘process’ of policy processes pivots. What is unusual about the unit of analysis in IC is that it spans political systems and policy subsystems and, hence, arguably spans different policy processes, as traditionally and commonly studied. For instance, if we were to use a policy cycle image of the policy process, then the policy instrument unit of analysis in IC would conceivably span across multiple policy cycles.

The fourth criterion is assumptions. All theories simplify the complexity of the policy process through a set of assumptions, that is, aspects of the policy process or its related research enterprise that are taken as true or for granted. One of the purposes of assumptions is to provide a commonly agreed upon platform of understanding for scholars interested in applying a theory in a research program. For the ACF, the main assumptions are explicitly stated as the following: scientific and technical information plays an important role in policy processes, public policies are translations of beliefs of members of coalitions with embedded causal depictions of problems and solutions, understanding and explaining policy processes require a long-term time perspective (e.g. 10 years or more), policy subsystems involve an expansive list of policy actors actively trying to influence subsystem affairs, and a useful way to simplify and organize inquiry into contentious policy issues is to cluster policy actors into advocacy coalitions. For IC, the assumptions are not stated in a formalized list but are mentioned throughout Voß and Simons (2014): policy instruments are to be understood through the innovation journey and are not distinct from policy actors, understanding the supply side of policy instruments is extremely important, the creation and diffusion of policy instruments should not be separated, and a useful way of organizing people involved with a policy instrument is through social entities operating as instrument constituencies.

From these assumptions, one of the major differences between the ACF and IC is the collective entity studied that gives agency to its depiction of the policy process. For the ACF, the basic collective entity is the advocacy coalition. For the IC, the basic collective unit is the instrument constituency. Both coalition members and instrument constituency members advocate for a particular policy instrument. For the ACF, coalition members advocate for policy instruments so long as those policy instruments reinforce and bolster their belief systems. In this regard, policy instruments would rest among the arrows in a quiver used in political competitions of one-upmanship between advocacy coalitions. However, the ACF is less concerned about the origination of the idea or the emergence of those arrows (i.e. policy instruments) in their quivers. For the IC, the basic collective unit is instrument constituencies, which are argued to be involved with the innovation journey of policy instruments, from the creation of policy instruments through their development, adoption, and evolution. The argument is that instrument constituencies would be involved in all phases of a policy instrument; hence, instrument constituencies would span multiple policy subsystems and be less concerned about the developments as occurring within any one policy subsystem.

9For the ACF, the unit of analysis and model of the individual are classified under its assumptions. They are separated in this comparison in an effort to highlight their importance.
The fifth criterion is hypotheses. Given that policy processes consist of an uncountable number of elements interacting in direct and indirect ways, there is a need to identify some relationships among concepts over others and to pinpoint those relationships needing testing and empirical confirmation or falsification. Hypotheses are one way to articulate these posited relationships, though they can also be posited in other forms, such as propositions, expectations, or principles. Moreover, putting aside different philosophical views of science, a pragmatic reason for stating hypotheses (or the like) is to help communicate and summarize contributions and limitations of a theory in conjunction with its empirical applications overtime towards the accumulation of generalizable and context-specific knowledge of the policy process. For the ACF, there is an established set of hypotheses within the three major theoretical emphases of coalitions, learning, and policy change that define its scope (see Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). Some of the ACF hypotheses have been confirmed, including the formation and maintenance of coalitions overtime based on shared policy core beliefs and the likelihood of policy change being precipitated by one of the ACF’s paths to policy change, such as events internal or external to a subsystem, learning, or negotiated agreements. However, some hypotheses have received mixed support, including the propensity of some belief system components to change more than others. For IC, the hypotheses have yet to be articulated but are needed to express the important parts of the proposed process within the innovation journeys of policy instruments. As will be discussed later in this essay, one of the next steps under the IC must be to develop answers to questions of why, where, when, and how policy instruments of various kinds emerge, succeed, and fail.

The fifth criterion is an archetypical depiction of the policy process. All policy process theories depict one or more stories, and often one dominant or archetypical depiction, about a partition of the policy process. It is usually from the archetypical story of the policy process that the theory is communicated and taught. It is also the baseline from which comparative research is empirically examined and later refined and developed. For the ACF, the archetypical process builds from its scope of focusing on contentious policy issues and the emergence of competing advocacy coalitions in utilizing their resources and strategies to outmaneuver their opponents, realize their policy goals, influence government decisions, and shape policy subsystem affairs overtime. The story under the ACF is an on-going one, with emphasis on the ways in which advocacy coalitions overcome oppositional resistance by capitalizing on changing circumstances and learning. For the IC, the emphasis is on the policy instrument and the social entities supporting it in the form of instrument constituencies who engage in various practices overtime that lead to the emergence from a kernel of an idea to a model of a policy instrument and then to an implemented policy of that instrument. Like the ACF, the story is ongoing with instrument constituency seeking the continued realization and adaptation of policy instruments driven by the policy instruments’ functional and structural promises across space and time.

The sixth criterion is practical lessons. Theories of the policy process cannot exist in an academic vacuum distinct from the real world, as too many of policy process theories are used in teaching future practitioners and broad impacts from theory-guided research are expected by funding agencies. This criterion asks questions about what practical advice a theory can provide to practitioners engaged in the policy process. For the ACF, insights point to the need to become involved in policy subsystems, to maintain involvement over extended periods of time, to form coalitions of allies, to be cautious about the usefulness of scientific and technical information in cross-coalition learning, and to take advantage of
political opportunities in the form of events external or internal to the policy subsystem. For the IC, insights point to the need to become involved with the innovation journey of a policy instrument, to maintain involvement over extended periods of time, to form social entities in the form of instrument constituencies to promote policy instruments, and to capitalize on political opportunities to put policy instruments into practice as afforded by different political systems and, from the ACF perspective, policy subsystems.10

The final criterion is implications for citizenship and democratic societies. This criterion asks questions about the implications of the theory for citizenship and democratic societies. It asks questions about whether a theory depicts or helps diagnose societal aspects that foster processes or procedures conducive to engaged citizens and democratic systems. To guide this analysis, Dahl’s process-based principles of a democracy are utilized (Dahl, 1998).11 Some policy process theories might point to ways of improving policy process towards Dahl’s principles and others might help diagnose policy processes with relation to those principles. The point of this criterion is to inquire about the potential of policy process theories to inform our understanding of citizenship and democratic societies. In a typical application, the ACF could highlight questions about representation and the extent that citizenry are involved in policy processes, the role of policy actors as guardians of the general public, the manipulation of information, and the political biases inherent in agenda setting processes. Similar to the ACF, the IC could raise questions about representation and the role of citizenry in the creation of policy instruments, the extent that citizens have a say on the set of agenda items emerging from the emerged policy instruments, and the role of guardians in making societal decisions. Both the ACF and IC raise important questions about the extent that citizens have equal political opportunities in the policy process, that is, do citizens have equal opportunities for influencing what policy instruments develop and what policies are adopted? While both the ACF and the IC can be useful in diagnosing a given policy process with regards to citizenship and democratic principles, they do not directly offer strategies for strengthening citizenship or democracy.

Overall, the ACF and the IC share some similarities but are fundamentally different in their scope in coverage of the policy process. These differences can be seen in the basic unit of analysis of policy subsystems for the ACF and policy instruments for the IC. The basic collective entities are also similar but not without their differences. The ACF’s advocacy coalitions are anchored within a policy subsystem and some of the policy instruments utilized in policy subsystems may be connected to IC’s instrument constituencies. The results are articulations of the policy process that feature different stories with different emphases. For the ACF, the story is one of dueling coalitions vying for influence in policy subsystem affairs. For the IC, the story is one of social entities promoting policy instruments and not bound by a particular political system or policy subsystem but rather motivated by the ideas encapsulated in the policy instrument. The result is divergent strategies for practitioners to influence the policy process and different ways of diagnosing and understanding the quality of citizenship and democracy of a policy process.

10For the ACF, the insights come both from the theory and the empirical applications. For the IC, the insights come mostly from its theoretical arguments.

11Dahl argues that a democracy involves processes featuring opportunities for ‘effective participation, equality in voting, gaining enlightened understanding, exercising final control over the agenda, and inclusion of adults’ (p. 38). Underlying these principles is a need to foster processes that enable political equality among its citizens, that is, equal opportunities for influence.
Part 2: opportunities for growth within instrumental constituencies

Successful theories are anything but static. They all need refinement, clarification of concepts, better articulation of theoretically posited relationships, more empirical applications, best practices for measuring and analyzing concepts, and a community of scholars interested and dedicated to their development overtime. Moreover, to motivate scholars to contribute to nurturing a theory, there must be intellectual space for those scholars to make a difference in a theory’s development. The purpose of this section is to identify areas of intellectual space ripe for development under the IC.

Currently IC operates as a framework of elements (e.g. policy instruments, models, policy implementation, functional promises, structural promises, social entities, practices, instrument constituencies). As discussed in the previous section, the framework on which these elements exist is bound by the scope of a given innovation journey of a policy instrument. Currently these elements provide a checklist and, hence, some guidance for researchers studying an innovation journey. But the same checklist also lacks guidance about how to connect those elements in describing and explaining an innovation journey. Needed is ‘theoretical’ guidance about how these elements might relate for different policy topics, across contexts, and overtime as well as best practices for how to study them. To address this need, the following theoretical questions need to be answered under the IC.

What is the model of the individual as a driver of change?

The IC must describe the human ‘black box’ to provide that micro-level explanation of what drives an innovation journey. The current argument within IC is that policy instruments have a ‘life of their own’ (Voß & Simons, 2014, p. 736), which suggests their own agency. Yet, instrument constituencies are the social entities that engage in practices of championing policy instruments. This creates an internal inconsistency of causal logic that can be resolved. It is the instrument constituencies comprised of individuals as social entities that give life to policy instruments and not vice versa. The more the model of the individual as linked to policy instruments can be articulated, the more an image of ‘life’ will appear real for policy instruments.12

Under what conditions do instrument constituencies exist (or not)?

Voß and Simons (2014) describe a situation of emissions trading and, through that case study, illustrate the existence of instrument constituencies. Yet, ponder the uncountable number of polices enacted by local, sub-national, national, and international governments continuously overtime – it would be infeasible for all of these policies to be formulated and enacted with the aid of instrument constituencies, especially given the plethora of ideas in the world. In studying instrument constituencies, it would be prudent to at least consider the argument of Kingdon (1984, p. 73):

when we try to track down the origins of an idea or proposal, we become involved in an infinite regress. An idea doesn’t start with the proximate source. It has a history. When one starts to

12Furthermore, to argue that policy instruments have a life of their own, independent of instrument constituencies, would be to dampen any future strategic recommendations to empower those social entities in promoting their policy instruments.
trace the history of a proposal or concern back through time, there is no logical place to stop the process. As one respondent pointed out, ‘This is not like a river. There is no point of origin.’ However, Kingdon’s interpretation of idea sources should not be assumed to be the case all the time. To assume instrument constituencies do not exist would be a mistake; likewise, to assume that instrument constituencies exist ubiquitously across policies would also be a mistake. If we recognize that instrument constituencies exist in some instances – but not in all instances – of alternative selection, policy formulation and policy adoption, the interesting and emergent puzzle involves identifying the conditions under which instrument constituencies exist or not in relation to a public policy.

**Under what conditions are instrument constituencies influential in political systems and policy subsystems (or not)?**

Even if instrument constituencies were to exist for some public policies, the next question to ask is about the conditions that they would be influential and important. Again, Kingdon’s view of this issue is worthwhile to consider (Kingdon, 1984, p. 72):

> Ideas come from anywhere, actually, and the critical factor that explains the prominence of an item on the agenda is not its source, but instead the climate in government or the receptivity to ideas of a given type, regarding the source.

Kingdon may have underplayed the potential power of instrument constituencies in shaping the menu of policy instruments available for consideration in formulating a public policy. Yet, we also know that, for many policy issues, the ideas populating agendas have been floating around for a long time, are well recognized, and do not require social entities to sponsor them. Instead of assuming that instrument constituencies will always be important when they exist, needed is a theoretical argument about the conditions under which instrument constituencies are influential in shaping policy processes.

**What factors explain the dynamism of the innovation journey?**

The ‘process’ of the IC is its innovation journey. However, the innovation journey of a policy instrument currently reflects something akin to the stages heuristic: a kernel of an idea, tentative practices, formalized models, implemented policies, and evaluation and learning (Voß & Simons, 2014, p. 736). To move towards a framework with bona fide theoretical arguments, the IC must articulate the conditions and causal logic for traversing this innovation journey of a policy instrument. Starting with a clear articulation of the stages of this journey is one useful way to simplify and help guide future research, but the next step must be in developing descriptive and explanatory expectations about this journey as it occurs across different contexts, with different social entities, and for different policy instruments.

**What enables social entities and instrument constituencies to overcome threats to collective action?**

Clearly, the argument that instrument constituencies are held together by practices (Voß & Simons, 2014, p. 742) is an insufficient explanation for overcoming threats to collective action and ignores decades of lessons learned on the topic from Olson (1965) to Ostrom
It makes most sense that the policy instrument is the glue for binding instrument constituencies together but, similar to shared beliefs, faith in the idea underpinning a policy instrument will also be insufficient for overcoming threats to collective action in bringing an instrument constituency together and maintaining a social entity’s involvement. A next step for IC is addressing the collective action problem with instrument constituencies.

**What is the role of politics in IC and the innovation journey of a policy instrument?**

Voß and Simons (2014) describe ICs as mostly devoid of politics,

> it is the apparent emptiness in terms of substantial political goals that lends instrumentally oriented projects of innovation their leverage and power (Palier, 2007). Such projects are able to generate collective agency that integrates a spectrum of political identities, viewpoints, and positions.

However, such an argument is internally inconsistent with other parts of the IC. For example, instruments have a functional and structural promises. Functional promises, for example, are defined as ‘the ability of instruments to achieve public goals’ (Voß & Simons, 2014, p. 739). Such promises are inherently political. Furthermore, without politics, there is no successful transformation of policy instruments as models into implemented programs, which is one of the goals of instrument constituencies.

Assuming the goal of the IC is to generate generalizable and context-dependent generalizations about the policy process, then answers to most of the questions above should be phrased as contextually and temporally based expectations that can come in various forms, such as propositions, principles, diagnostic criteria, or hypotheses. Any of these expectations must not be derived from a single case study, but from lessons with a high number of diverse cases. Furthermore, research conducted under the IC without best practices for gathering and analyzing data will lead to insights about the policy process that could be attributed to either contextual or methodological idiosyncrasies. That is, the fruitful development of a theory must coincide with the development of best practices for its application.

**Part 3: research at the intersection of Instrument Constituencies and the Advocacy Coalition Framework**

Given the right research question or objective, the ACF and IC can be complementary approaches on the same research project. Yet, in order to capitalize on the opportunities to do research at the intersection of the ACF and IC, there must be a better effort in linking the two research programs. It is important for IC to assume that policy instruments are not static, passive, and stable, but it is an oversimplification to assume that theories such as the ACF assume the opposite. The ACF, for example, depicts a constant struggle in the formulation of public policies as coalition members attempt to translate their views into the means and ends of policy content. Hence, to argue that the ACF depicts public policy as it is being formulated and adoption as static, passive, and stable is inaccurate. Moreover, the ACF would argue that public policies could evolve overtime through learning or simply through power struggles

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13 Similar arguments could be made with regards to the Multiple Streams Approach. My sense is that the static, passive, and stable depiction of policy instruments is mostly derived from the diffusion and innovation literature, where, given their typical methodological approach, public policies are dichotomized as either adopted or not while ignoring how those policies are adapted in a given context.
between coalitions. Thus, policy instruments are not separate from policy actors within the ACF. Some coalition members will be champions and entrepreneurs of public policies and sometimes policy solutions (i.e. policy instruments) are the glue that bind coalitions together. Hence, policy instruments and their connection to coalition members is of utmost importance in understanding policy-related conflicts under the ACF. However, the investments in the initial creation of policy instruments are most likely outside the realm of coalition members (although this is an open empirical question). In addition, the role of outside expertise, perhaps instrument constituencies, in policy subsystem affairs is also understudied within the ACF. In thinking about the ACF and IC, artificial barriers should be avoided and efforts taken to make connections and find commonalities to enable joint applications and accumulation of knowledge.

Research questions and hypotheses are posited below in relation to the ACF and IC. Obviously, these questions and hypotheses are not exhaustive, but are hopefully consistent with the theoretical logic of the ACF and IC.14

**What is the relationship between instrument constituencies and advocacy coalitions in high conflict policy subsystem?**

The first question focuses on the network relations within and between advocacy coalitions. Given that policy core policy preferences (that by definition include one or more policy instruments) is often the stickiest glue that binds coalitions together, instrument constituencies would likely be allies to one coalition and opponents to another coalition member in high conflict policy subsystems. As stated, this is primarily because instrument constituencies would be perceived by coalition members as providing valuable information in achieving their political goals. The social entities comprising instrument constituencies would be interpreted politically as allies or opponents and unlikely as brokers. Given instrument constituencies would be championing their idea across multiple policy subsystems at the same time and given opportunities for adopting public policies emerge sporadically, they would also unlikely be stable and central coalition members, but rather peripheral in the network and varying in their involvement overtime. This leads to two hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 1.* In high conflict policy subsystems, instrument constituencies will likely be allies to one coalition and opponents to another coalition.

*Hypothesis 2.* In high conflict policy subsystems, instrument constituencies will likely be peripheral allies within a coalition network and unstable participants over time.

By definition, policy actors, mobilized by their policy core beliefs and coordinating their behavior with political allies, would be advocacy coalition members in comprising a policy subsystem. Instrument constituency members would become coalition members if they became involved in a policy subsystem and matched this definition. In doing so, many would cease to be active members of an instrument constituency because they would no longer be able to operate across that many policy subsystems all the time. Certainly, a person could be a member of more than one policy subsystem but there is a trade-off between involvement with many policy subsystems and influence in any of them.

14Arguably, the hypotheses posited in this section would be most applicable to democratic societies with high state capacity (see Weible, 2016 for a discussion). Additionally, it is assumed that the subsystems in these hypotheses are mature, not nascent. Indeed, it is quite likely the case that instrument constituencies would have a more influential role in nascent subsystems than mature subsystems given uncertainty with respect to problem and solution understandings as well as these impacts on coalition polarization in the former.
To what extent do instrument constituencies influence learning within and between advocacy coalition members in high conflict policy subsystems?

Arguably, instrument constituency would be influential in shaping learning about the viable solutions to different problems in a policy subsystem. Given that policy solutions are tied to belief systems, the hypothesis is the following.

_Hypothesis 3_. In high conflict policy subsystems, instrument constituencies will more likely foster within coalition learning than between coalition learning about the utility of a particular policy instrument.

The rationale for this hypothesis is the same as it would be for any scientist providing valuable information to policy actors involved in advocacy coalitions. That is, valuable information in policy subsystems is usually interpreted through cognitive filters and with political ends. The result is learning that reinforces positions through confirmation biases within coalitions and limited tendency to challenge presuppositions across coalitions.

What is the type and extent of influence of instrument constituencies and advocacy coalitions on agenda setting and policy change in high conflict policy issues?

Under this question, the strengths and weaknesses of the defining characteristics of instrument constituencies and advocacy coalitions are taken into consideration. For instrument constituencies, their strength is coming up with ideas and fostering them into bona fide policy instruments. From a Cobb and Elder (1971) perspective, instrument constituencies would probably be most influential in determining the menu on the systematic agenda under consideration for a political system or policy subsystem. Moving policy instruments from the systematic agenda to the institutional or decision agenda would require long-term political involvement and most likely coalitional support that would be very difficult for social entities not steadily involved in any one policy subsystem to achieve. For getting things onto the institutional and decision agenda, advocacy coalitions would have the advantage because their strength is committing long-term resource and strategies in shaping policy decisions in a policy subsystem, but less so in shaping the systematic agenda. In addition, in high conflict policy subsystems, the existence of coalitions would limit the influence of instrument constituencies given their outsider status unless they were to align with a set of coalition allies because coalitions would most likely control access to authority and the associated venues affecting subsystem affairs. From these basic roles, definitions, and explanations, the following hypotheses are posited:

_Hypothesis 4_. In high conflict policy subsystems, instrument constituencies will more likely influence the systematic agenda and less likely influence the institutional or decision agendas.

_Hypothesis 5_. In high conflict policy subsystems, instrument constituencies will more likely influence public policies and politics when aligned with an advocacy coalition.

Part 4: insights about the field of policy process research

The emergence of IC is an exciting development and another reminder that policy process research continues to generate innovative and original theory. It also underscores how policy processes can be approached from multiple perspectives and, in doing so, gain different and novel insights into the phenomenon.
However, the emergence of IC, especially when combined with other new and established theories, raises questions about how to interpret and make sense of the field (Cairney, 2013; Schlager & Weible, 2013). There are several ways in which people have attempted to make sense of this growing field. Three of these ways are discussed below, which are somewhat consistent with Cairney (2013).

One way that policy process theories are in competition is that we should let the best survive and the rest succumb.\(^{15}\) The problem with this interpretation is that it assumes that the different theories answer the same questions and in the same context; however, this assumption is wrong. Moreover, one of the principal goals of policy process research is the accumulation of generalizable and context-specific knowledge, which is not a zero-sum game. The complexity of policy processes is infinite enough (or that our knowledge of it is so much in its infancy) that one theory’s contribution is unlikely to diminish another’s. Instead of thinking competitively, try thinking cooperatively in how the different theories can be leveraged to gain as many insights into policy processes as possible. In this essay, the ACF and IC are certainly not in competition as they are attempting to describe and explain different, yet sometimes overlapping, partitions of the policy process.

Another way to make sense of the growing theoretical field of policy processes is by responding with theoretical mashups. Theoretical mashups are when two or more different theories are combined into a new theory.\(^{16}\) Theoretical mashups can be beneficial but they should be guided by standards to ensure quality and usefulness. For example, theoretical mashups should strive to adhere to the original conceptual definitions and internal theoretical logic of the contributing theories. For instance, two theories with radically different models of the individual will not mash well together as the fundamental drivers will be internally inconsistent as explanations for change. Theoretical mashups that dismiss a contributing theory’s conceptual definitions should also be avoided as the result is a distortion and a loss of the descriptive and explanatory leverage that inspired the mashup in the first place. In this essay, for example, the research questions and hypotheses – I hope – accurately represent the current conceptual definitions of IC and ACF in offering a way of discovering something new about the policy process.\(^{17}\)

A third way forward is to view theories as tools in a toolbox. This way begins by recognizing that the depth within theories and then too articulate the contexts and questions most applicable to the theories. That is, we should be paying more attention to the scope of theories when comparing and organizing them. In the context of this essay, the ACF is very useful in high conflict policy subsystems when the goal is understanding aspects of coalitions, learning, and policy change. If the goal is to understand the innovation journey and the source of the menu of policy instruments, IC would be a very useful approach.

\(^{15}\)In 2008, Hank Jenkins-Smith organized a ‘policy shootout’ which was a tongue-in-cheek title of the event not meant to be taken literally as if the theories were in competition. See Cairney (2013) for an example of the misinterpreted legacy of the Oklahoma policy shootout.

\(^{16}\)I define theoretical mashups as deliberate attempts to create a new theory from more than one. Theoretical mashups are different than using insights from more than one to describe or explain a particular case.

\(^{17}\)Other mashups involving IC fall below these standards. For example, Béland and Howlett place advocacy coalitions in Kingdon’s political streams and, in doing so, dismiss conceptual definitions and overlook theoretical logic of the ACF. It would be better for Béland and Howlett (2016) to remove the ACF from their mashup given they lost any insights gained from including the ACF. Yet, their argument is not entirely inconsistent with the hypotheses offered in this essay. The difference (outside of hypotheses vs. tables, which are both acceptable ways of positing expectations) is that this essay offers arguments that maintain the conceptual definitions and theoretical logic found within the ACF; hence, knowledge is gained by building on the past.
The challenges with how to juggle the different theories of policy processes is indicative of a field that is continuously expanding beyond its boundaries. Such expansions are welcomed and expected given that policy process research has always been imagined as a complex system (to various extents and with different words, see Weible (2016)) and hence all of its partitions and boundaries are artificial in their construction and should be crossed and pushed. At the same time, as we take steps in a causal sense away from the public policy fulcrum of policy processes in studying distant concepts (such as the source of policy instruments) the degree of influence and effect may diminish or change. Certainly, the extent that instrument constituencies shape the menu of policy instruments can be an important question to answer and possibly a very powerful source of influence. Nonetheless, in policy subsystems where the policy instruments are well recognized among policy actors and have existed for years to decades, the notion of tracing policy instruments back to their source in time, and possibly across space, becomes increasingly intractable, less important, and most likely impossible.

Overall, the continued development in theories of policy processes should be encouraged as long as we appreciate the depth that exists with the established theories, dedicate years to developing new theories, and disregard as necessary any theory that has outlived its usefulness. IC is an exciting new approach for understanding part of the policy process. Through comparisons with other theories, theoretical refinement and development of its elements, and empirical applications, IC has the most potential to provide valuable insights into the creation of policy instruments through innovation journeys and instrument constituencies.

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