# Advocacy Coalition Framework in Higher Education

Policy change in higher education refers to the incremental shift in the existing structures or new as well as innovative policies. When lobbying for a change in the higher university policies, there is need to analyze the political environment. The process of policy development requires the identification and analysis of the stakeholders and the resources. It is, therefore, vital for the understanding of the political context in which a social policy issue is embedded.

## Advocacy Coalition Framework

It is also significant to understand the political context of the higher education policy because there are a set of ideas concerning value and causation in public policies in general (Sabatier, 2012; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 2013). Coalitions form because particular interests are connected to them and it is important to map the network of shareholders within the higher education policy sector. “Change is derived from the ability of the ideas to adapt’ (John, 2013). Thus, policy change occurs through the interactions between the broad external shocks or changes to the political system as well as the triumph of the ideas in the coalitions (Bennett & Howlett, 2012). This might cause the shareholders in the advocacy alliance to shift alliances.

## Stakeholders and Resources

The relatively stable parameters of the system influence the events of the external system which impact the resources as well as constraints of the actors in the subsystem. The policy subsystem is made up of several advocacy coalitions which have their resources, beliefs, and strategies. The primary concern of the policy brokers is to keep the level of the political conflict within some acceptable limits as well as making sure that a reasonable solution to the problem is reached (Sabatier, 2012). Governmental programs are influenced by the decision by policy makers thereby affecting the policy output and impacts. Moreover, the feedback effects are present policy subsystem. “Advocacy coalitions within policy sub-systems are a critical tool for the understanding of the role of policy analysis in the policy-oriented learning as well as the effect of the learning on the changes in the governmental programs” (Sabatier, 2016).

These shareholders are holding different positions such as elected as well as agency officials, researchers, and interest group leaders shape a certain belief system and demonstrate a significant degree of activities which are coordinated over time (Sabatier, 2012). Advocacy coalition framework uses belief system such as a set of basic values, problem perceptions, and causal assumption rather than interests because they are more verifiable and inclusive (Sabatier, 2012) and can be indicated by content analysis and questionnaires.

## Higher Education

Gornitzka, Kogan, and Amaral (2015) assert that the advocacy coalition framework to the higher education policy because it is affected by stable factors. For example, overall income, the level of education in the society, cultural norms concerning elitist and the egalitarian strategies which govern the access to higher education. Moreover, more important factors which provide the major sources of policy change such as systems-wide ruling coalition and socio-economic conditions. Coalitions of politicians, researchers, and interest groups emerge in reforms of higher education policies. The introduction, sustenance as well as assessing the educational change is viewed as a political process because it deals with issues of representation and conflict among the multiple shareholders (Hargreaves, 2014). The process of changing the schooling system requires significant changes to the long-standing institutions and political will. When major changes are involved, politics affects the public policies’ origins, formulation as well as implementation (Reich, 2015).

## Strengths and Weaknesses

The policy subsystem is utilized as the basis for the development of the policy change assumption and through linking it to the political system as well as viewing the advocacy coalitions as the major units of the internal structures (Sabatier, 2012). The model does not limit the self-interest of shareholders but limits the capacity to process information and requires them to view the world through the set of beliefs (Sabatier 2014). The ACF is designed especially for policy areas which are characterized by high technical uncertainty concerning cause and nature of the problem, high goal conflict and various shareholders from different levels of government (Hoppe & Peterse, 2013).

Challenges associated with ACF include difficulties in determination of the beliefs of the shareholders, mapping of the advocacy coalitions as well as the establishment of internal and external factors affecting the policy subsystem. According to Sabatier (2014), in the higher education case, ACF is limited because it does not involve a competing belief system and high goal conflict. Moreover, the neutral position of researches and agency officials as civil servants is compromised in a policy sub-system Sabatier (2014).

Changes for success require effective methods for analysis of relevant political conditions as well as shape the major political factors favoring policy changes.

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