

Seminar 3 — Mapping an Advocacy Coalition

IR227 Politics of Change

July 2026

What you'll do in 90 minutes

[Bridge to seminar] *Map the advocacy coalitions in your assigned case. Identify their three-tier belief systems. Name the broker if there is one. Explain why change has happened (or hasn't) over the past decade. Then a brief reflection: does ACF fit cleanly, or would PET or MSF do better?*

- Six cases, three pairs, deliberately paired.
- Each group: 3–4 students, one case.
- Map and analyse, draft your briefing, exchange with your paired case, then present.

Three methodological points up front

1. A coalition is a collective with shared *policy-core* beliefs, persistent over time — not simply “the people who want X.” (Nohrstedt et al. 2023)
2. The three tiers are analytically distinct: deep core is philosophical, secondary aspects are administrative, policy core is where positions organise coalitions. Don't collapse them.
3. ACF analyses run on decade-plus horizons. A one-year political moment isn't yet an ACF coalition change. (Nohrstedt et al. 2023)

Six cases, three pairs

Pair	Case A	Case B
Climate ACFs	Brazil (confrontational)	China (cooperative)
Regulatory politics	EU pharma DTCA-PD	China birth-control 1980–2015
Cash transfers	Brazil's <i>Bolsa Família</i>	Mexico's <i>Oportunidades</i>

Within each pair: same archetype, different strategy / political system / coalition pathway. (Nohrstedt et al. 2023; OECD 2025)

Recap: the three-tier belief structure

Framework: ACF beliefs

Deep core Fundamental normative commitments. Liberty vs equality, role of government.

Policy core Positions on the proper scope of government in this domain. Causal understandings within the domain.

Secondary aspects Implementation details. Which agency, which standards, what budget.

Coalitions form around shared *policy core* beliefs. (Nohrstedt et al. 2023)

Recap: the four pathways to change

1. External shocks (elections, crises, demographic shifts).
2. Internal shocks (scientific findings, technological discontinuities).
3. Negotiated agreements (rare; require hurting stalemates and brokers).
4. Accumulated evidence (slow; via professional forums).

Each predicts different observable conditions before, during, and after change. (Nohrstedt et al. 2023)

Recap: policy brokers

- Mediators between coalitions, not advocates.
- Often institutionally located (senior civil servants, certain judges, intergovernmental staff).
- Distinct from policy entrepreneurs — brokers don't push a position.
- Authority depends on perceived neutrality.

Negotiated agreements need brokers. So do many learning episodes. (Nohrstedt et al. 2023)

Phase 1 — map and analyse (20 min, no laptops)

1. Identify the major coalitions in your case (typically 2–3).
2. Map each coalition's beliefs at all three tiers: deep core, policy core, secondary aspects.
3. Name a policy broker if one is visible.
4. Identify which of ACF's four pathways best explains change (or stability) in your case over the past decade.

Output: a sentence per coalition you can defend with evidence, plus a pathway verdict.

Phase 2 — draft your briefing (15 min, Claude allowed)

Case: The diagnostic memo

- One paragraph: the ACF map — coalitions, beliefs, broker, change pathway, verdict.
- Two-to-three sentences: framework reflection — does ACF fit cleanly, or would PET (subsystem politics + venue shopping) or MSF (streams + coupling) do better?

Be specific. “ACF fits” is not a defensible answer; “ACF fits because of X, but PET would catch Y better” is.

Phase 3 — exchange briefings (5 min)

- Swap your written briefing with your comparative-case group (same pair, paired case).
- Read their verdict, evidence, and framework reflection.
- Note one point of contrast to raise in the plenary: same archetype — why does the verdict differ?

Phase 4 — present (5 min per group)

Each group presents its own ACF map, then names the contrast with its comparative case.

- Climate: Brazil vs. China — same archetype, opposite strategies. Why?
- Regulation: EU pharma vs. China birth control — same archetype, different political systems. Why?
- Cash transfers: Brazil vs. Mexico — same archetype, similar outcomes via different strategies. Why?

Three things to take away

1. ACF works as a diagnostic when the three tiers stay distinct. Collapsing them is the most common failure mode.
2. Coalition strategy is contingent on opportunity structure. Same beliefs can produce different tactics in different systems.
3. The framework-fit question matters. Choosing the right framework for the question is itself an analytical skill.

Tomorrow: from *when change is possible* to *how change can be steered*.

- Nohrstedt, D., K. Ingold, C. M. Weible, E. A. Koebele, K. L. Olofsson, K. Satoh, H. C. Jenkins-Smith, and C. M. Weible (2023). **“The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Progress and Emerging Areas”**. eng. In: *Theories of the Policy Process*. 5th ed. Routledge, pp. 130–160.
- OECD (2025). **Government at a Glance 2025**. Paris: OECD Publishing.