In political science, **pluralism** is a very general theory of government and politics that focuses on conflict and influence among groups on democratic government, public processes, policy outputs, and outcomes.

In addition to studying government actors/organizations, pluralism directs researchers toward the study of non-government organizations (e.g., interest groups) seeking to influence government in bargaining and compromise, for example.
Pluralism Since the Founding...

Madison’s Federalist Paper #10 (1789)

- People divide into “factions” (now called groups, interests, coalitions, power centers…)

- Each faction seeks own goals without regard for the public interest.

- As long as there are many groups with no one group dominating all others, power will not become overly concentrated and all groups will be willing to conduct themselves within the constraints of the constitution.
Pluralism as a Common (perhaps dominant description) of Government Processes

“When the groups are adequately stated, everything is stated. When I say everything, I mean everything. The complete depiction will mean the complete science” (Bentley, 1908; pg 209).

“We shall never find a group interest of the society as a whole. We shall always find that the political interests and activities of any given group – and there are no political phenomena except group phenomena – are directed against other activities of men, who appear in other groups, political, or other.” (Bentley, 1908; pg 222)
“One cannot live in Washington for long without being conscious that it has these whirlpools or centers of activity focusing on particular problems. The persons who are thus active – in agriculture, in power, in labor, in foreign trade, and the parts thereof – are variously composed. Some are civil servants, some are active members of the appropriate committees in the House and Senate, some are lobbyists, some are unofficial research authorities, connected perhaps with the Brookings Institution or with one of the universities, or even entirely private individuals.”

Griffith (1939; pg 182)
Pluralism as Detrimental to Democracy

“the flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent”

(Schattschneider, 1960; pg 35)
Iron Triangles

Iron Triangles, aka Subgovernments

Legislative Committee

Bureaucratic Agency

Interest Group

e.g., Freeman (1955)
Iron Triangles

"The iron triangle concept is not so much wrong as it is disastrously incomplete" (Heclo, 1978; pg 88)

e.g., Freeman (1955)
Advocacy Coalitions

Traditional notions of iron triangles suffer because they are generally limited to interest groups, administrative agencies, and legislative committees. They need to be expanded to include journalists, analysts, researchers, and others who play important roles in policy processes.

Advocacy coalitions are aggregations of individuals who share policy core beliefs and who coordinate their behavior over extended periods of time.

Sabatier (1988)
Advocacy Coalition Framework

Assumptions

• Central role for scientific and technical information

• Understanding the policy processes requires long-term time perspectives

• Policy subsystems (combines top down/bottom up perspectives)

• Extensive set of actors influencing subsystem affairs.

• Policies and programs are translations of beliefs.
Five Subsystem Properties

Property 1. Policy subsystems contain an uncountable number of components within their boundaries that interact in nontrivial ways to produce outputs and outcomes for a given policy topic.

Property 2. Policy subsystems demarcate the integrated and nonintegrated actors on a given policy topic.

Property 3. Policy subsystems are interdependent (horizontally) and nested (vertically).

Property 4. Policy subsystems must provide a degree of authority or potential for authority.

Property 5. Subsystems undergo periods of stasis, incremental change, and major change.
Property 3. Policy subsystems are interdependent (horizontally) and nested (vertically).
Advocacy Coalition Framework

ACF’s Model of the Individual

1. Boundedly rational with limited abilities to process external stimuli and, thus, to learn from experiences

2. Selection and interpretation effects (biased assimilation)

3. Beliefs serve as primary causal driver

4. People remember losses more than gains, “devil shift”
Obama's the One

Angel Shift <----------------------------- > Devil Shift
Belief Systems

Deep Core Beliefs: Normative values that span multiple subsystems. *The survey you took is one way to measure deep core beliefs using Cultural Theory.*

Policy Core Beliefs: Subsystem specific beliefs about the causes, seriousness, and solutions to a public policy problem. Mixes both empirical understandings and normative values.

Secondary beliefs: Narrow beliefs that relate to only a part of the subsystem and that are very empirically oriented.
Hierarchs

- Prefer that people have defined roles in society, place great value on procedures, lines of authority, and social order
- King’s Court
- High grid (rules), high group
Individualists

- Little to no group identity, and feels bound by few structural prescriptions, dislikes constraints
- Lone cowboy
- Low grid, low group
Egalitarians

• Seek strong identities and prefer minimal external prescriptions
• Prefer society based on equality within the group rather than one that includes rank and status
• Powerful sense of social solidarity and vest authority in the group rather than individual
• High grid, low group
Fatalists

- Consider themselves as subject to binding external constraints
- Feel excluded from membership in social groupings that shape larger societal outcomes
- Believe that have little agency in life
- High grid, low group
Take a moment and reflect on your policy preferences on the following issues.

Limiting ammunition magazines for gun control
Decreasing social welfare benefits
Increasing tuition for higher education
Banning trans fats

After you reflect on your preferences, consider the following question: To what extent – if at all – does your deep core beliefs as measured by Cultural Theory help explain your preferences.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deep Core</th>
<th>Policy Core</th>
<th>Secondary Aspects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defining characteristics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fundamental normative and ontological axioms</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fundamental policy positions concerning the basic strategies for achieving core values within the subsystem</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope</strong></td>
<td><strong>Across all policy subsystems.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Subsystemwide</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Susceptibility to change</strong></td>
<td><strong>Very difficult; akin to a religious conversion.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Difficult, but can occur if experience reveals serious anomalies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illustrative components</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Instrumental decisions and information searches necessary to implement policy core</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Human nature:</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Usually only part of subsystem</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Inherently evil vs. socially redeemable</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Moderately easy; this is the topic of most administrative and even legislative policymaking</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Part of nature vs. dominion over nature</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. <strong>Seriousness of specific aspects of the problem in specific locales</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Narrow egoists vs. contractarians</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. <strong>Importance of various causal linkages in different locales and over time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Relative priority of various ultimate values: Freedom, security, power, knowledge, health, love, beauty, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3. <strong>Most decisions concerning administrative rules, budgetary allocations, disposition of cases, statutory interpretation, and even statutory revision</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Basic criteria of distributive justice: Whose welfare counts? Relative weights of self, primary groups, all people, future generations, nonhuman beings, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Information regarding performance of specific programs or institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sociocultural identity (e.g., ethnicity, religion, gender, profession)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Notes:**
- The “Policy Core” model places importance on understanding the core values and strategies within subsystems, while the “Secondary Aspects” focus on the instrumental decisions and information searches necessary for implementation.
Belief System Example

Colorado Climate Change/Energy Policy Subsystem

Deep Core Beliefs: General beliefs related to the relative tradeoff between rules promoting environmental protection vs. rights to a free market and economic development (recall Dahl)

Policy Core Beliefs: Climate change is a severe problem for Colorado. Colorado should adopt a carbon tax.

Secondary Aspects: A one cent should be charged to every gallon of gasoline sold.
Conflict, Pluralism, Dialectic

Coalition 1

Extended Conflict → Synthesis → ...

Coalition 2
Advocacy Coalition Framework: circa 2007

Relatively Stable Parameters
1. Basic attributes of the problem area and distribution of natural resources
2. Fundamental sociocultural values and social structure
3. Basic constitutional structure

Long Term Coalition Opportunity Structures
1. Degree of consensus needed for major policy change
2. Openness of political system
3. Overlapping Societal Cleavages

Policy Subsystem
Coalition A
Beliefs
Resources
Strategies
Decisions by Government Authorities
Institutional Rules
Policy Outputs
Policy Impacts

Coalition B
Beliefs
Resources
Strategies

External Subsystem Events
1. Changes in socio-economic conditions
2. Changes in public opinion
3. Changes in systemic governing coalition
4. Changes in other policy subsystems

Short Term Constraints and Resources of Subsystem Actors

Decisions by Government Authorities
Institutional Rules
Policy Outputs
Policy Impacts
Figure 2. Number of Advocacy Coalition Framework Publications by Substantive Topic from 1987 to 2006.
The diagram shows the count of advocacy coalition studies by year and geographic scope from 1987 to 2006. The x-axis represents the years, and the y-axis represents the count. The bars are color-coded to indicate the geographic scope:

- Africa
- South America
- Australia
- International
- Asia
- Canada
- Europe
- United States

The study count varies significantly across different years and geographic scopes.
Frameworks
1. Specify assumptions
2. Identify scope of phenomena and opportunities for theoretical inquiry and modeling
3. Establish general categories and definitions of concepts (hence a common language) and suggest general relations among them
4. Provide prescriptive advice for applying the framework

Theories
1. Narrow the scope of the phenomena and identify a subset of concepts from the framework
2. Interrelate those concepts into a set of relations that affect outputs/outcomes usually in the form of hypotheses/propositions
3. Establish rationales (causal drivers and causal mechanisms) that explain the interrelations and the outputs/outcomes
A Hierarchical Depiction of the ACF

Theory of Coalitions

Theory Policy-Oriented Learning

Theory Policy Change

Advocacy Coalition Framework
Theory of Coalitions – Key Questions

- What is the structure of the networks and belief systems of advocacy coalition members?
- How stable is coalition membership over time?
- What is the role of different organizations within coalitions?
- How much consensus is there among coalition members?
- What are the patterns of coordination?
- What strategies and resources do coalitions use to achieve their policy goals?

- Why do coalitions form?
- Why do coalition members overcome threats to collective action?
- Why do coalition allies negotiate with opponents?
Theory of Coalitions – Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. On major controversies within a policy subsystem when policy core beliefs are in dispute, the lineup of allies and opponents tends to be rather stable over periods of a decade or so.

Hypothesis 2. Actors within an advocacy coalition will show substantial consensus on issues pertaining to the policy core beliefs, although less so on secondary aspects.

Hypothesis 3. An actor (or coalition) will give up secondary aspects of his (its) belief system before acknowledging weaknesses in the policy core beliefs.

Hypothesis 4. Within a coalition, administrative agencies will usually advocate more moderate positions than their interest-group allies.

Hypothesis 5. Elites of purposive groups are more constrained in their expression of beliefs and policy positions than elites from material groups.
Theory of Learning – Key Questions

- What belief system components are changing through learning?
- To what extent is one coalition learning more than another coalition?
- What contexts and events foster learning by coalition members?
- How does learning diffuse among allies within a coalition?
- What contexts and events foster learning by brokers?
- To what extent, if at all, does a broker facilitate in learning between coalitions?
- Why does learning occur, if at all, between some members of opposing coalitions and not others?
Theory of Learning – Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. Policy-oriented learning across belief systems is most likely when there is an intermediate level of informed conflict between the two coalitions. This requires that: a) each have the technical resources to engage in such a debate; and that b) the conflict be between secondary aspects of one belief system and core elements of the other or, alternatively, between important secondary aspects of the two belief systems.

Hypothesis 2. Policy-oriented learning across belief systems is most likely when there exists a forum which is: a) prestigious enough to force professionals from different coalitions to participate; and b) dominated by professional norms.

Hypothesis 3. Problems for which accepted quantitative data and theory exist are more conducive to policy-oriented learning across belief systems than those in which data and theory are generally qualitative, quite subjective, or altogether lacking.

Hypothesis 4. Problems involving natural systems are more conducive to policy-oriented learning across belief systems than those involving purely social or political systems because in the former many of the critical variables are not themselves active strategists and because controlled experimentation is more feasible.

Hypothesis 5. Even when the accumulation of technical information does not change the views of the opposing coalition, it can have important impacts on policy—at least in the short run—by altering the views of policy brokers.
Theory of Policy Change – Key Questions

- To what extent is major and minor policy change occurring within the subsystem over time?
- What is the content of minor and/or major policy change?
- Why do some events and contexts lead minor and major policy change?
- What are the mechanisms linking internal and external events to minor and major policy change?
- How do negotiated agreements lead to policy change?
- When does policy-oriented learning lead to policy change?
Changes in socioeconomic conditions OR Changes in public opinion OR Changes in systemic governing coalition OR Policy impacts from other subsystems

Authority OR Public Opinion OR Information OR Financial Resources OR Skillful Leadership OR Mobilizable Troops

Policy impacts internal to the subsystem

Hurting Stalemate & Inclusive Representation & Neutral Leadership & Consensus Decision Rules & Funding & Commitment & Empirical Focus & Trust

Intermediate level of conflict & Availability of Technical Resources & Conflict involves Empirical Aspects OR

Existence of Theory and Quantitative Data OR Emphasis on Natural Systems OR

Prestigious Forum with Professional Norms

External Event OR

Exploitive Coalition

Exploitive Coalition & Internal Event

Negotiated Agreements

Policy-Oriented Learning

Major &/Or Minor Policy Change
Hypotheses 1 (revised). Significant perturbation external to the subsystem, a significant perturbation internal to the subsystem, policy-oriented learning, negotiated agreement, or some combination thereof are necessary, but not sufficient, cause of change in the policy core attributes of a governmental program.

Hypothesis 2. The policy core attributes of a governmental program in a specific jurisdiction will not be significantly revised as long as the subsystem advocacy coalition that instituted the program remains in power within that jurisdiction—except when the change is imposed by a hierarchically superior jurisdiction.
Strengths of the ACF

• Provides a comprehensive framework for understanding policy processes from group relations, learning, and to policy change.
• While a large focus of the framework is on policy change (adoption), the framework shifts the focus to a policy subsystem, group interactions, and all stages of the policy process.
• Strong international following with many independent applications.

Weaknesses of the ACF

• A complex moving target, many revisions over time.
• Hard to define subsystems, especially overlapping subsystems
• Underdeveloped theory (e.g., linking events to policy change)
• Avoids normative question about how to better society
• Beliefs vs. Interests
Why the ACF?

- Reminds us that understanding government requires some understanding of groups and group relations.
- The ACF can be used as a policy analysis tool for mapping political landscapes/stakeholder analysis (see assigned reading and policy analysis memo 3)?
  - How to depict political conflicts? Is the time right for policy change?