An Advocacy Coalition Framework Approach to Stakeholder Analysis: Understanding the Political Context of California Marine Protected Area Policy

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing recognition that public policy controversies are driven more by value differences than by technical deficiencies. Unfortunately, we have yet to develop, test, and refine systematic approaches for understanding political systems. In this article I explain how the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) can be used as a theoretical basis for understanding political context via a stakeholder analysis. An ACF stakeholder analysis widens the attention of policy analysts toward subsystem-wide dynamics with multiple actors who are motivated by their beliefs, structure their relationships into advocacy coalitions, and try to influence policy through utilizing multiple resources and venues. I illustrate an ACF approach to stakeholder analysis in a scientifically contentious political conflict over the establishment of marine protected areas in California. I conclude with a summary of contributions to the ACF literature and the strengths and limitations of conducting an ACF stakeholder analysis.

The Death of Environmentalism (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2004) criticized the environmental movement for defining the underlying causes of environmental problems as technical deficiencies rather than value conflicts. While Shellenberger and Nordhaus’s criticism shocked the environmental community, they were not the first to argue that environmental or policy conflicts were driven more by differences in values than analytical shortcomings in technology and science (Dror 1967; Fiorino 1990; Jenkins-Smith 1990; Kingdon 1994; Mazur 1981; Meltsner 1972; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999). Mazur (1981, 41) probably said it best: “Many technical controversies are primarily disputes over political goals and only secondarily concerned with the veracity of scientific issues which are related to these goals.”

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For policy analysts dealing with analytically intractable policy issues, one implication from this observation is to focus not only on conducting a high-quality, technical analysis (such as a benefit-cost analysis) but also on developing a good understanding of the political context of the problem. Most policy analysis textbooks agree that understanding political systems is an important step in recommending alternatives (Patton and Sawicki 1993; Weimer and Vining 2005). Unfortunately, there has been relatively little effort devoted to developing a theoretical framework to guide policy analysts in understanding policy disputes. The goal of this article is twofold: (1) to explain how the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) can be used as a theoretical basis for understanding policy disputes via a stakeholder analysis and (2) to demonstrate an ACF approach to stakeholder analysis with a case study of marine protected area (MPA) policy in California.

I begin this article with an assessment of the typical methods of conducting a stakeholder analysis. I then explain how to conduct an ACF stakeholder analysis and why an ACF approach addresses some of the deficiencies of other approaches to stakeholder analysis. I illustrate an ACF stakeholder analysis with original data on California MPA policymaking. I conclude with a discussion of potential users and the strengths and limitations of conducting an ACF approach to stakeholder analysis.

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Stakeholder analysis is defined by identifying opportunities and constraints for calculating the likelihood that a strategy, venue, or alternative will be successful in initiating or preventing belief and policy change. Almost all applications of stakeholder analysis address a similar set of questions (Brugha and Varvasovsky 2000; Crosby 1991; Susskind and Thomas-Larmer 1999). These questions include:

1. Who are the stakeholders to include in the analysis?
2. What are the stakeholders’ interests and beliefs?
3. Who controls critical resources?
4. With whom do stakeholders form coalitions?
5. What strategies and venues do stakeholders use to achieve their objectives?

In general, stakeholder analysis helps policymakers conceptualize the dynamics of a policy subsystem. It has a broader perspective than political feasibility analysis, which tends to focus on the probability of successfully implementing a particular policy alternative for a particular problem (May 1986; Meltsner 1972; Weimer and Vining 2005). Instead, stakeholder analysis focuses on mapping the activities of multiple stakeholders employing multiple strategies in multiple venues. This broad perspective is extremely important in the United States or any other political system that is open to multiple participants, where authority is shared among actors and institutions, and where there are ample opportunities for losers of one policy battle to strike back against winners later in the policy process (Weber 1998).

1 There are many definitions of stakeholder analysis (Brugha and Varvasovsky 2000; Crosby 1991; Grimble and Wellard 1997). This definition is based mostly on May (1986) and from the premises of the ACF (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999). Venues are institutional arenas within which stakeholders have the opportunity to influence policymaking.
To help navigate this political landscape, stakeholder analysis provides a guide to investigate stakeholders’ perceptions regarding the severity, causes, and proposals of a problem, the distribution of resources among coalitions, and the accessible political venues for influencing policy. This helps policy analysts, leaders, and other stakeholders identify political roadblocks, develop strategies for achieving objectives, and find paths to collective agreements. The beneficiaries of a stakeholder analysis tend to be policy participants in leadership positions, such as directors and program managers, who work above the street level and who need to develop a systematic map of a political community. Policy analysts can also use stakeholder analysis to make recommendations to clients if the alternatives they are considering are sufficiently broad in scope or are long-term strategies.

It is somewhat surprising that policy analysis, which trains students to deal with policy problems with political ramifications, deals more with technical feasibility than with political feasibility. This might be because teaching analytical techniques is easier and has a longer pedagogical history than teaching political competency. Indeed, the leading American textbooks in policy analysis spend just a few pages or, at the most, a chapter on understanding political contexts (Bardach 2005; Patton and Sawicki 1993; Stokey and Zeckhauser 1978; Weimer and Vining 2005). This neglect is even more surprising considering that the policy analysis literature has long recognized that the effectiveness of technically astute policy analysts is limited because of their inattention to politics (Dror 1967; Jenkins-Smith 1990; May 1986; Meltsner 1972; Radin 2000; Weiss 1977).

Despite its sparse coverage in policy analysis textbooks, stakeholder analysis has not been completely neglected (for a review see Brugha and Varvasovsky 2000). Good applications can be found in health policy (Glassman et al. 1999), natural resource/environmental policy (Grimble and Wellard 1997; Ramirez 1999), strategic management of private and public organizations (Freeman 1984; Lindberg and Crosby 1981), policy evaluation (Brown et al. 2001; Gregory and Wellman 2001), and collaborative policymaking (Carpenter and Kennedy 1988; Susskind and Thomas-Larmer 1999). However, a review of this literature suggests at least three major limitations to current approaches to stakeholder analysis.

First, some have noted that stakeholder analysis is easily outdated, making the implicit assumption that stakeholder coalitions, beliefs, resources, and strategies change too rapidly to make a systematic stakeholder analysis worthwhile (Brugha and Varvasovsky 2000). In this article I outline a theoretical framework to help understand the frequency and magnitude of change in a policy subsystem and the likely effects on the different parts of a stakeholder analysis.

Second, many stakeholder analysts create typologies or matrices of key stakeholder variables, such as stakeholder alliances, interests, policy positions, and resources, but do not specify a theoretical basis for explaining the causal interdependence among these variables and how a combination of these variables affects belief and policy change (Crosby 1991; Meltsner 1972). In this article I outline a theoretical framework that ties the essential components of stakeholder analysis together.

Third, like political feasibility analysis, most applications of stakeholder analysis focus on a single alternative or venue (Crosby 1991; Ramirez 1999; Susskind and Thomas-Larmer 1999). For example, Susskind and Thomas-Larmer (1999) used conflict assessment to estimate the likely success or failure of one venue (a consensus-based process). Conducting a stakeholder analysis on one particular venue or alternative limits the substantive reach of the policy conclusions and the utility over time. To complement
AN ADVOCACY COALITION FRAMEWORK APPROACH TO STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

One theoretical framework to ground a stakeholder analysis is the advocacy coalition framework (Sabatier 1988; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, 1999). The advocacy coalition framework is frequently used to explain stakeholder behavior and policy outcomes in intense political conflicts over periods of a decade or more (Sabatier and Weible 2005). The ACF offers a different approach to stakeholder analysis because the ACF defines a policy subsystem—not a specific venue or alternative—as the most useful unit of analysis and has explicit assumptions and hypotheses regarding (1) the substantive and territorial boundary of the policy issue and who to include in a stakeholder analysis; (2) the structure of individual beliefs and motivations to influence policy; (3) individual motivations to form relationships (into advocacy coalitions); (4) the identification of stakeholder resources and available political venues; and (5) the factors necessary to produce major and minor policy changes. There are many theoretical descriptions of the ACF (Sabatier 1988; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, 1999). This section contributes to the theoretical exposition of the ACF by explaining how it can be used to conduct a stakeholder analysis and by describing some of the underdeveloped components of the ACF, such as coalition resources.

Policy Problems and Stakeholders Bounded by a Policy Subsystem

The ACF assumes that the most useful unit of analysis for conducting a stakeholder analysis is the policy subsystem (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999). Researchers and analysts define a policy subsystem by a set of policy participants and territorial and substantive scopes. Stakeholders specialize in a policy subsystem and maintain their participation over long periods of time in order to foster, among other reasons, the institutionalization and implementation of policy objectives (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Stakeholders in a policy subsystem include local, state, and federal government officials, interest groups, nongovernmental organizations, community groups, researchers/scientists, members of the media, and target groups. These stakeholders often carry out several strategies to influence the decisions in several venues. For example, stakeholders might simultaneously pressure political sovereigns, court the media, consider litigation, and try to convince opponents to support their views in public meetings.

Stakeholders Motivated by Belief Systems

The ACF presumes that individuals are boundedly rational with cognitive constraints (Simon 1985), filter perceptions by a hierarchical belief system (Scholz and Pinney 2000), and have explicit assumptions and hypotheses regarding (1) the substantive and territorial boundary of the policy issue and who to include in a stakeholder analysis; (2) the structure of individual beliefs and motivations to influence policy; (3) individual motivations to form relationships (into advocacy coalitions); (4) the identification of stakeholder resources and available political venues; and (5) the factors necessary to produce major and minor policy changes. There are many theoretical descriptions of the ACF (Sabatier 1988; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, 1999). This section contributes to the theoretical exposition of the ACF by explaining how it can be used to conduct a stakeholder analysis and by describing some of the underdeveloped components of the ACF, such as coalition resources.
1995), remember losses more than gains (Quattrone and Tversky 1988), and therefore, exaggerate the influence and maliciousness of opponents (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999). The individuals in the ACF are motivated to convert their beliefs into policy but are limited in their ability to do so. Since individuals’ identities are closely tied to their beliefs, they tend to filter or ignore dissenting information or events that challenge their beliefs and readily accept information that bolsters their beliefs. People are also very suspicious of people with dissimilar beliefs and remember lost policy battles more than previous gains. This makes individuals highly susceptible to exaggerating the influence and maliciousness of their opponents, which in turn strengthens their ties with others who have similar beliefs (Sabatier and McLaughlin 1987).

Following the public attitude and opinion research (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Putnam 1976), the ACF assumes that the defining characteristic of individuals is their three-tiered hierarchical belief system (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, 1999). On the top tier are deep core beliefs, which are normative/fundamental beliefs that span multiple policy subsystems and are very resistant to change (for example, political conservatism). In the middle tier are policy core beliefs, which are normative/empirical beliefs that span an entire policy subsystem. The ACF identifies eleven categories of policy core beliefs, including perceptions of the severity and causes of subsystem-wide problems, orientation on basic value priorities directly related to the policy subsystem, the effectiveness of policy instruments, and the proper distribution of authority between the market and government (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999, 133). Policy core beliefs are still resistant to change but are more pliable than deep core beliefs. On the bottom tier are secondary beliefs, which are empirical beliefs that relate to a subcomponent (either substantively or territorially) of a policy subsystem. Of the three layers of beliefs, secondary beliefs are most susceptible to change in response to new information and events. For stakeholder analysis, measures of the different components of deep core and policy core beliefs are likely to remain stable for long periods of time—making this part of a stakeholder analysis applicable over time.

**Stakeholders Use Policy Core Beliefs to Structure Advocacy Coalitions**

The ACF assumes that stakeholders are primarily motivated to convert their beliefs into actual policy and thereby seek allies to form advocacy coalitions to accomplish this objective. Advocacy coalitions include actors of similar policy core beliefs who engage in a nontrivial degree of coordination (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999, 120). Since policy core beliefs are resistant to change and structure participation in advocacy coalitions, coalition membership is predicted to remain stable for a decade or more, extending its utility for a stakeholder analysis (Zafonte and Sabatier 2004).

**Stakeholders Utilize Resources**

Most stakeholder analyses identify a set of resources available to coalitions for achieving their objectives (Meltsner 1972). Based partly on Kelman (1987) and Sewell (2005), the ACF assumes that individuals employ available resources that enable them to carry out strategies in a variety of venues to influence policy. The categories of resources include (Sabatier and Weible 2005):

Access to legal authority to make policy decisions. The ACF views many agency officials, legislators, and even some judges as members of advocacy coalitions. When this happens, direct political access and influence become a major resource for an advocacy coalition.
(Sabatier and Pelkey 1987). In fact, an important feature of a dominant coalition, in comparison to minority coalitions, is that it has more of its members in positions of formal authority.

**Public opinion.** Opinion polls documenting support for the policy views of advocacy coalitions are a major resource. A coalition with strong public support can argue that it represents the public interests, which can be used to lobby new legislation, to press for changes in rules and regulations, and to shift resources to the coalition’s cause. A supportive public is also likely to elect coalition supporters to positions of legal authority. Consequently, stakeholders within the subsystem typically spend a lot of time trying to convince the public to support their advocacy coalition’s policies and candidates.

**Information.** For the most part, the ACF views information as political salvo to win policy disputes. The ACF assumes that information is utilized by stakeholders to buttress their coalition’s membership, to argue against the policy views of an opposing coalition, to convince decision-making sovereigns to support their positions, and to influence public opinion. In this effort, stakeholders might spin or even distort information to their advantage. Having better information than opponents does not guarantee a policy victory, but it does force opponents to expend additional resources to neutralize the advantage (Sabatier and Weible 2005). This is one of the reasons why the ACF spotlights the role of analysts, researchers, and consultants within coalitions. It also explains why analysis at the policy subsystem level is helpful in explaining the use and effect of policy analyses, reports, and scientific and technical information (Sabatier and Zafonte 2001).

**Mobilizable troops.** The political outcomes often hinge on the mobilization of public supporters and the expansion of conflict (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Coalitions periodically ask supporters from the general public to participate in events to help achieve objectives. Supporters might be asked to engage in letter-writing campaigns, to provide labor in electoral and fund-raising campaigns, and to participate in public demonstrations and other activities. In fact, coalitions with minimal financial resources typically rely very heavily on mobilizable troops, especially when a coalition’s interests are threatened by reductions in government-sponsored benefits or additional government oversight and regulations.

**Financial resources.** Money is a valuable resource because it can be used to purchase other resources. A coalition with deep pockets can bankroll sympathetic candidates, thereby gaining inside access to legislators and political appointees. A coalition might also finance research and think tanks to generate information to alter the policy process, to sway public opinion, and to mobilize their supporters.

**Skillful leadership.** The literature on policy entrepreneurs demonstrates how skillful leaders can help navigate a coalition toward policy victories (Kingdon 1994). In fact, public policy research describes how most antecedents to policy change—for example, external shocks—dispose a political system to change, but skillful entrepreneurs are needed to bring about actual changes in policy (Kingdon 1994; Mintrom and Vergari 1996). Coalition leaders help articulate a coherent belief system for other coalition members, thereby strengthening their resolve and focus. Leaders also attract additional resources to their coalition, which offer more strategic choices and open venues to influence policy (Mintrom and Vergari 1996; Muller 1995).

**Stakeholders Attempt to Influence Policy in Venues**

The ACF predicts that stakeholders will strategically use their resources to influence policy in multiple venues. Venues are institutional arenas within which stakeholders have the
opportunity to influence policymaking. Stakeholders spend considerable amounts of time venue shopping, looking for institutional access where they might have a competitive advantage. They often launch offenses in several venues and defend their interests in several venues simultaneously. Based partly on Sabatier and Pelkey (1987), potential venues include elections, public referenda and decisions in legislatures, chief executives, courts, and agencies. The ACF predicts that coalitions will choose to employ resources to influence venues based on attaining the most policy benefits per incurred costs (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999, 142).

**Initiating or Preventing Major and Minor Belief and Policy Change**

One of the underlying goals of stakeholder analysis is to help analysts evaluate the political response to policy recommendations and the likelihood that recommendations will lead to the desired outcome, which typically include major changes in policy. The ACF predicts two precursors to major policy change: changes in beliefs of a dominant coalition or changes in available resources and venues. Changes in beliefs or in available resources and venues are brought about by external shocks, policy-oriented learning, or hurting stalemate.

External shocks are events that occur outside of a policy subsystem. Examples include changes in socioeconomic conditions, changes in governing coalitions, and impacts from other subsystems (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999). External shocks dispose a policy subsystem to policy change in two ways. First, external shocks may open or close venues or shift resources because of renewed attention of the public or key sovereigns. This adjusts the power among coalitions, thereby tipping the advantage to a different coalition with different policy core beliefs. Second, external shocks may change components of the policy core beliefs of a dominant advocacy coalition in the policy subsystem. During an economic recession, for example, a proregulatory advocacy coalition may reconsider the adverse economic effects on target populations from stringent controls (Zafonte and Sabatier 2004).

The second mechanism of belief change is learning over long periods of time from the gradual accumulation of information, such as a scientific study, policy analysis, and experiences of various local stakeholders (Bennett and Howlett 1992; May 1992; Sabatier 1987). The ACF defines policy-oriented learning as “relatively enduring alterations of thought or behavioral intentions that result from experience and/or new information that are concerned with the attainment or revision of policy objectives” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999, 123). Policy-oriented learning affects the beliefs of actors within the policy subsystem, which can lead to major policy change. Learning is inhibited, however, because individuals face cognitive constraints and filter or avoid belief-conflicting information. Whereas external shocks can lead to rapid changes in individual policy core beliefs and, consequently, the policy core aspects of a policy subsystem, policy-oriented learning may take ten years or more to generate similar changes. Policy-oriented learning has a larger effect on secondary beliefs, which are more pliable to information, than on policy core beliefs.

A third mechanism of policy change is a hurting stalemate (Zartman 1991). A hurting stalemate is a situation in which all parties involved in the dispute view a continuation of

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3 The ACF defines major policy change as an alteration of a policy that is subsystem-wide (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999). In contrast, the ACF defines minor policy change as modification of a specific policy, which is a subcomponent of a policy subsystem (changes in secondary aspects of the policy subsystem). Minor policy change occurs more frequently but with a smaller magnitude.
the status quo as unacceptable and run out of alternate venues to achieve their objectives (Sabatier et al. 2005). The assumption is that individuals satisfied with the status quo have little incentive to give up anything in negotiations. Individuals are also unlikely to compromise in negotiations when they have access to other venues where they can win outright. In both situations, negotiating toward a collective agreement is probably a waste of time. Only when both coalitions are out of options and dissatisfied with the current situation are they willing to compromise and negotiate for major shifts from the status quo. Successful negotiations among coalitions require the existence or the establishment of a professional forum (or collaborative institution) based on fair procedural rules and norms (Sabatier et al. 2005).

The ACF offers an alternate approach to conducting a stakeholder analysis. It broadens the substantive scope away from a single alternative or venue by focusing attention at the policy subsystem level. It explains why conflict is not about technical deficiencies but about value differences because stakeholders are motivated to convert their beliefs into policy, filter out dissonant information, and structure their interactions within homogeneous advocacy coalitions. It specifies that policy core beliefs are the most important stakeholder attribute for understanding individual behavior. It also provides a theoretical justification for the longevity of stakeholder analysis. For instance, in the absence of external shocks, the ACF predicts that measures of coalition structure and stakeholder policy core beliefs should be stable for a decade or more. After an external shock, resources may be redistributed and venues may change. Even after an external shock, the ACF predicts that stakeholder deep core beliefs and most components of policy core beliefs will remain stable, and basic coalition structure will remain the same (Zafonte and Sabatier 2004). In the next section I conduct a partial ACF stakeholder analysis in a case study of the California Marine Life Protection Act policy subsystem.

AN ACF STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS OF THE CALIFORNIA MARINE PROTECTED AREA POLICY SUBSYSTEM

The 1999 California Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) charged the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) with developing a plan to establish marine protected areas (MPAs) along the coast. MPAs are a space-based management strategy that restrict access to areas of the ocean and limit, to various degrees, extractive activities. The DFG has attempted to implement the MLPA twice and is currently attempting it a third time.

The first attempt to implement the MLPA involved a master plan team of scientists. Working behind closed doors, the master plan team created a proposal for the placement of MPAs based only on the natural sciences and with priority toward protecting habitat. During the summer of 2001, the DFG organized ten public meetings to present the science-based proposal in a traditional public hearing format. Most of the fishing interests and local government officials reacted with outrage. They were upset about the proposed size and locations of the proposed MPAs and indignant for not being consulted by the DFG. In response to political pressure from the fishing community, the California DFG abandoned the master plan team process six months after the public meetings.

In the summer of 2002, the DFG attempted to implement the MLPA a second time. The second effort included seven regional working groups. Each working group consisted

4 After developing a master plan, the California Department of Fish and Game would submit the plan to the California Fish and Game Commission for authorization.
of fourteen to eighteen stakeholders representing a range of interests. The stakeholder working groups were asked to provide recommendations for the placement of MPAs to the DFG. Negotiations began in the summer of 2002, but the working group process ended in the spring of 2003 because of insufficient funding during the California budget crisis.

The third attempt to implement the MLPA began in 2004. Financed by private sources, the third attempt shifted authority up to the California Resources Agency (the agency in charge of the DFG). To help guide the third attempt, the secretary for resources appointed a new statewide “Blue Ribbon Task Force,” which consisted of a mix of stakeholder leaders. The Blue Ribbon Task Force organized another collaborative process with just one stakeholder group on the central California coast, postponing negotiations for the northern and southern coasts until a later time. The third attempt is ongoing.5

I illustrate a partial ACF stakeholder analysis using data collected after the master plan team process but before the start of the stakeholder working group process (that is, between the first and the second attempts to implement the MLPA). The goal of this ACF stakeholder analysis is to use existing data to examine and explain the current political state of the MLPA policy subsystem. Using data that are approximately three years old has limitations. There has been at least one shock (a budget crisis) to this policy subsystem. The ACF predicts that most policy core beliefs and coalition membership have probably remained the same and can still be useful for identifying impediments to conflict resolution in the ongoing attempt to implement the MLPA.6 Therefore, I spend most of the analysis studying commonalities and differences in policy core beliefs, with some emphasis on identifying areas of conflict mitigation and consensus. Less time is spent discussing and drawing generalizations from the data regarding resources and venue. This is because a limited amount of data on resources and venues were collected back in 2002 and because this information will likely have changed over the past few years.

**Policy Subsystem Scope and Stakeholders**

I define the spatial boundary of the MLPA policy subsystem by California ocean waters and the topical boundary by a specific governing tool: MPAs. These boundaries are largely based on the legal specification of the legislation.7 Major industries that depend on coastal marine resources include commercial fisheries, recreational fisheries, and various nonconsumptive recreational activities, such as touring and scuba diving.

To identify stakeholders either directly or indirectly involved in influencing the MLPA process, I conducted over fifty informal interviews in the late spring and early summer of 2002. These informal interviews were used to help understand the history of this policy subsystem, to design and pretest a survey, to establish a stakeholder advisory committee to help guide the research design, and to start a snowball sample of additional stakeholders involved in the MLPA process (Singleton and Straits 1999, 163). I modified the snowball technique with additional individuals or organizations quoted in newspapers, by identifying individuals who have published on the California MLPA process, and by

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6 This is a prediction that is worth testing rather than assuming, but another survey of this subsystem is beyond the scope of this article. See Zafonte and Sabatier (2004) for empirical evidence of the longevity of policy core beliefs and coalitions.
7 Many policy subsystems are not as clearly defined, especially when there is not a dominant piece of legislation defining the legal boundaries.
attending three preliminary MLPA working group meetings in the summer of 2002. After four months of preliminary work, I established a list of 310 MLPA stakeholders, which was reviewed by members of the stakeholder community. The sample of stakeholders included federal government officials, state government officials, local government officials, harbormasters/directors, kelp harvesters, commercial fishers, recreational fishers, commercial passenger fishing vessel operators, professional boating/touring association operators, consumptive divers, nonconsumptive divers, environmentalists, and researchers (university and consultants).

After these preliminary informal interviews, additional data were collected in the late summer of 2002 using three methods. The first method included an additional forty-eight semistructured, in-person interviews of policy participants representing a cross-section of the stakeholder community. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, returned for comment, and then coded. The second method was an analysis of documents and reports. The third included a mail-in questionnaire administered to a sample of 310 (number of respondents = 194, 62 percent response rate).

**Policy Core Beliefs**

Table 1 lists the organizational affiliations across the top row and the different components of policy core beliefs in the far left column. The seven affiliations used in this analysis include commercial fishers (including kelp harvesters and commercial passenger fishing vessel operators), recreational fishers (including consumptive divers), local governments (including harbormasters/directors), federal government officials, state government officials, researchers, and environmentalists (including nonconsumptive divers). All numbers are means. The stakeholders are listed in order of their extent of agreement to expand MPAs in California (their policy core policy preference).  

8 I also asked who could be potential players but are not yet involved. In northern California one group that was mentioned was Native American tribes. While I conducted an informal interview with a Native American and mailed questionnaires to two Native Americans, this stakeholder group did not respond, limiting the generalizability of these results to that population of stakeholders.

9 More specifically, the sample was collected from three sources. Starting with suggestions from nearly fifty preliminary interviews, a snowball-sampling technique generated a list of stakeholders (n = 178) and a list of California Department of Fish and Game officials (n = 13). A publicly available list provided the initial active members on the stakeholder working groups (n = 105). A publicly available list provided the initial members on the master plan team (n = 14). Please see Weible, Sabatier, and Lubell (2004) for a discussion on sample limitations.

10 It is also important to highlight that the variables in table 1 are policy core beliefs and not secondary beliefs. Examples of secondary beliefs would include, for example, stakeholder evaluations of the master plan team recommendations from the first MLPA process. An assessment of the master plan team recommendations would be the typical information collected in a political feasibility analysis or a stakeholder analysis (focusing on one venue or set of alternatives). This information was collected for this study, but obviously, with that process ended and the initial proposal tabled, the utility of these beliefs have been greatly reduced.

11 In table 1 there are fourteen policy core beliefs measures across four different component categories (policy core policy preferences, problem seriousness, problem causes, and important uses of MPAs), with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 7 indicating “strongly agree.” For clarity, some questions are rescaled to a 7-point scale from a 100-point scale wherein 0 indicates “not a problem at all” and 100 indicates “an extremely severe problem” (100-point scale questions include numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9). The wording of the policy core beliefs is as follows: (1) “MPAs need to be expanded in California”; (2) “Marine habitat destruction”; (3) “Loss of biodiversity”; (4) “Reduced commercial fish landings”; (5) “Reduced recreational fish landings”; (6) “Most California fisheries are economically healthy” (reversed); (7) “Incidental by-catch”; (8) “Water pollution”; (9) “Coastal development/population growth”; and “The most important uses of MPAs along the California coast include (10) Ecosystem protection, (11) scientific research sites, (12) educational opportunities, (13) recreational opportunities, (14) fisheries management.”
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<th>Policy Core Policy Preferences</th>
<th>Commercial Fishers</th>
<th>Local Government</th>
<th>Recreational Fishers</th>
<th>Scientists</th>
<th>State Government</th>
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<td>1.7</td>
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<td>California fish economy unhealthy</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
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<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>population growth</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
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<td>Important Uses of MPAs</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For ecosystem protection</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For science</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For education</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For recreation</td>
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<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All numbers are means. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree (not a problem), 7 = strongly agree (serious problem). All p-values are significant (p < .00), except for “reduced recreational fish landings” (p < .18) and water pollution (p < .45). P-values indicate significant difference among affiliations (Welsch Test assuming unequal variance).
Stakeholders are polarized in their preferences to expand MPAs in California. On one end, scientists, state government officials, federal government officials, and environmental groups support the expansion of MPAs (means > 6.1). On the other end, commercial fishers, recreational fishers, and local government officials oppose the expansion of MPAs (means < 2.7).

Stakeholders from both sides of the debate agree on some aspects of the severity and causes of the problem and on some important uses of MPAs. Unfortunately, there is a mismatch between where they agree on a problem and where they agree on the important uses of MPAs. For example, most stakeholders agree that MPAs are useful for protecting ecosystems, but stakeholders disagree about the severity of marine habitat destruction and biodiversity loss, which makes MPAs an effective solution to a disputed problem. Likewise, most stakeholders agree that California fisheries are in trouble but disagree that MPAs are a viable approach to fisheries management or for providing good recreational opportunities, which makes MPAs a disputed solution to a commonly perceived problem.

There are also some differences in the beliefs of recreational and commercial fishers. Recreational fishers perceive reductions in commercial fish landings as an insignificant problem, whereas commercial fisheries perceive it as a serious problem. Recreational fishers also perceive incidental by-catch, which is unwanted marine species caught in fishing gear, to be a major cause, but commercial fishers do not. This makes sense because incidental by-catch is mostly attributed to commercial fishing and not recreational fishing. In the interviews, many recreational fishers also blamed commercial fishers for the depleted fishing stocks.12

Coalition Members

I identify advocacy coalitions using ally and opponent networks (Salisbury et al. 1987; Zafonte and Sabatier 1998). For ally networks, I asked respondents to cite two affiliations that “you regard as allies on important MPA issues.” For opponent networks, I asked respondents to cite two affiliations that “you disagree with most frequently on MPA issues.” The respondents were given a list of thirteen organizational affiliations from which to cite.13

In tables 2 and 3 the affiliations on the top row are the citing affiliations and the affiliations on the left column are the cited affiliations. All numbers are percentages of all citations for each citing affiliation to each cited affiliation. For example, looking down the first column of table 2, the forty-six commercial fishers had a total of seventy-eight citations for allies, of which 40 percent went to commercial fishers (thirty-one cites) and 5 percent went to environmental groups (four cites).

Tables 2 and 3 show at least two coalitions.14 Paralleling policy core beliefs, one coalition consists of affiliations with pro-MPA beliefs, including scientists, state government officials, federal government officials, state government officials, local government officials, harbormasters/directors, kelp harvesters, commercial fishers, recreational fishers, commercial passenger fishing vessel operators, professional boating/touring association operators, consumptive divers, nonconsumptive divers, environmentalists, and researchers (university and consultants).

The stakeholder affiliations are clustered using a Tabu Search Cluster Analysis, which produces an anti-MPA cluster in the left columns and the cluster of pro-MPA affiliations in the right columns of tables 2 and 3 (Hanneman 2001). The existence of at least two advocacy coalitions is consistent with previous studies (Weible 2005; Weible and Sabatier 2005) wherein coordination networks are very similar to ally and disagreement networks. Information networks show that most stakeholders seek information from scientists and state government officials.
### Table 2
Ally Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Commercial Fishers</th>
<th>Local Government</th>
<th>Recreational Fishers</th>
<th>Scientists</th>
<th>State Government</th>
<th>Federal Government</th>
<th>Environmental Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti-MPA Cluster</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Respondents</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Cites</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pro-MPA Cluster</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cited Organizational Affiliations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Fishers</td>
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<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
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<td>24%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational Fishers</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientists</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<td>14%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental Groups</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Tabu Search Cluster Analysis indicates two optimal clusters: an anti-MPA cluster and a pro-MPA cluster ($R^2 = 0.89$). Percentages indicate the number of citations for each organizational affiliation by the total number of potential cites per organizational affiliation. Respondents were asked to cite two affiliations that “you regard as allies on important MPA issues.”
Table 3
Opponent Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anti-MPA Cluster</th>
<th></th>
<th>Pro-MPA Cluster</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial Fishers</td>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>Recreational Fishers</td>
<td>Scientists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Respondents</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Cites</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>53</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cited Organizational Affiliations</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial Fishers</td>
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<td>5%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
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<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational Fishers</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientists</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Government</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Tabu Search Cluster Analysis indicates two optimal clusters: an anti-MPA cluster and a pro-MPA cluster ($R^2 = 0.91$). Percentages indicate the number of citations for each organizational affiliation by the total number of potential cites per organizational affiliation. Respondents were asked to cite two affiliations that “you disagree with most frequently on MPA issues.”*
officials, federal government officials, and environmental groups. Within the pro-MPA coalition, scientists and environmental groups are most likely viewed as allies by pro-MPA affiliations (14–47% of ally citations) and most likely viewed as opponents by anti-MPA affiliations (16–49% of opponent citations). State and federal government officials align themselves within the pro-MPA coalition but are less frequently considered allies by pro-MPA affiliations (0–22% of ally citations) or as opponents by anti-MPA affiliations (5–18% of opponent citations).

Rivaling the pro-MPA coalition is an anti-MPA coalition that includes commercial fishers, local government officials, and recreational fishers. Among the anti-MPA affiliations, the strongest and most reciprocated alliance is between commercial fishers and local government officials who frequently regard each other as allies and very rarely disagree with each other. The close alliance of commercial fishers and local governments makes sense. They show little concern about California marine habitats and biodiversity, recognize that fisheries need improvement, do not feel that MPAs are a useful approach to manage fisheries, and are strongly against the expansion of MPAs in California.

Splinter members of the anti-MPA coalition are recreational fishers.15 Recreational fishers consider other recreational fishers their best allies, rarely mention local governments as allies, and are very ambivalent in their views of commercial fishers, who are considered as opponents just as often as allies. Recreational fishers are also perceived as opponents by pro-MPA affiliations. Recreational fishers’ policy core beliefs are similar to commercial fishers and local governments in most aspects. As competitors for the same resource, however, they show very little concern for reductions in commercial fish landings, blame the commercial industry for declines in fisheries, and consider by-catch a significant causal problem.

Coalition Resources

The pro-MPA coalition controls a sizable amount of resources but not enough to steamroll the anti-MPA coalition.16 The pro-MPA coalition is supported by the MLPA, which gives them legal authority to plan and to establish MPAs in California. The pro-MPA coalition is also backed by the general public. A controversial 2002 survey of the general opinion of California shows the public supporting the establishment of MPAs in California (Edge Research 2002). Buttressing the pro-MPA coalitions is mounting scientific evidence of a rapid and drastic degradation of California marine resources, a strong capacity for MPAs to protect and restore marine ecosystems, and some capacity for MPAs to enhance and restore fisheries (Leet et al. 2001; Lubchenco et al. 2003). The pro-MPA coalition has access to mobilizable members from the large environmental groups (for example, Natural Resource Defense Council and Environmental Defense) and from the science community. For instance, nineteen pro-MPA scientists contributed to a paper promoting the expansion of MPAs to help recover and protect marine fisheries and ecosystems (Murray et al. 1999).

15 Using different categories (thirteen instead of seven) of organizational affiliations, Weible and Sabatier (2005) found that the recreational fishers, commercial passenger fishing vessel operators, and consumptive divers often clustered in their own ally, coordination, and information networks.

16 Since the 2002 mail-in questionnaire had very few questions on resources and venues, I use information from the interviews and documents for the next two sections. In addition, since resources and venues are the most likely to change over time, the following discussions are brief.
No organization in the pro-MPA coalition controls multimillion or billion dollar assets that can bankroll large-scale political campaigns in California, but some of the major pro-MPA interest groups (for example, Environmental Defense) can hire employees to coordinate relatively small-scale campaigns. The missing link for the pro-MPA coalition has been insufficient state funding, which ended the second attempt to implement the MLPA. With private donations, the funding problem appears temporary resolved for the current attempt. At the individual level, pro-MPA stakeholders engage in MLPA activities with varying degrees of financial support. Most federal and state government officials are paid to participate, but most scientists and environmentalists volunteer their efforts.\(^\text{17}\)

Compared with the pro-MPA coalition, the anti-MPA coalition controls fewer resources. The anti-MPA coalition operates with little support from the general public and is skeptical of existing MPA scientific evidence. The anti-MPA coalition frequently mentions scientific studies regarding the uncertain effects of MPAs on fisheries. No anti-MPA organizations control multimillion-dollar assets that can bankroll large-scale political activities, though some anti-MPA organizations support staff (for example, the United Anglers). At the individual level, most local officials are paid to participate in MLPA processes, but most recreational fishers and commercial fishers volunteer their efforts.\(^\text{18}\) As displayed in the master plan team process, the anti-MPA coalition can mobilize a sizable number of supporters and apply sufficient political leverage to delay and steer the MLPA process to its advantage in a collaborative process.

**Available Venues**

The pro- and the anti-MPA coalitions have been active in several venues. Organized by local harbormasters and directors, the anti-MPA coalition called on the state legislature to amend the MLPA to reflect the economic effects of MPAs on the fishing community.\(^\text{19}\) Members from both coalitions mentioned litigation as an option if the MLPA process failed to satisfy their interests. In addition, a few commercial and recreational fishermen claimed that the MLPA violates their state constitutional right to fish and discussed pursuing litigation. Despite these efforts and claims, the MLPA has not been amended, and no lawsuits have been filed in the MLPA policy subsystem. Both coalitions were pressuring government agencies, but the extent of coalition activity and influence is unknown. It is evident that pressure from the anti-MPA advocacy coalition on the state government ended the master plan team process. It has also been contended that state pressure from the anti-MPA advocacy coalition, combined with the California budget crisis, postponed the second attempt to implement the MLPA.

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\(^\text{17}\) On the mail-in questionnaire, respondents were asked, with 1 indicating “all company time” and 7 indicating “all own time,” “When you work on issues directly related to the [stakeholder] working groups, is this on company time or your own time?” The results show that local, federal, and state government officials participate on company time (means < 4). In contrast, scientists, environmentalists, recreational fishers, and commercial fishers tend to be there on their own time (means > 4).

\(^\text{18}\) See previous footnote.

\(^\text{19}\) The mail-in questionnaire also asked stakeholders to respond to the possibility of an amendment to the MLPA with the following question, asked on a 7-point scale (with 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree): “The Marine Life Protection Act should be amended to lessen the economic impact on the fishing industry.” The results show the same polarization with anti-MPA affiliations strongly supporting amending the MLPA (mean = 5.6) and the pro-MPA affiliations strongly opposing the proposal (mean = 2.4).
Belief or Policy Change

The California MPA policy subsystem has experienced an external shock with the California budget crisis that effectively ended the second attempt to implement the MLPA. Another possible shock was the election of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has put his name behind, and helped raise money to fund, the third MLPA process. Given these shocks, there has yet to be a major change in MPA policy, and it is hard to imagine how an additional shock could do so.

It is unlikely that scientific evidence alone will lead to belief or policy change via policy-oriented learning. First, the conflict over MPAs appears to be driven by normative preferences to establish MPAs. Normative beliefs are largely impervious to conflicting information, making learning extremely difficult. Second, many of the scientists working on these reports are also members of the pro-MPA advocacy coalition. For the pro-MPA advocacy coalition, this makes scientific and technical information an important resource. In contrast, anti-MPA coalition members are likely to refute or ignore any information coming from pro-MPA scientists.

There are mixed indicators for a hurting stalemate. On the one hand, it is just too early in the process to assess whether stakeholders have exhausted all the available venues. On the other hand, neither advocacy coalition is getting what it wants. The pro-MPA advocacy coalition has been unsuccessful in establishing MPAs. Similarly, the anti-MPA coalition has thus far been unable to amend or to stop completely the implementation of the MLPA. The best option for both coalitions might be a consensus-based approach.

Summary of the California Marine Life Protection Act Policy Subsystem

The California MLPA policy subsystem is polarized between a pro-MPA advocacy coalition (environmentalists, scientists, and state and federal government officials) and an anti-MPA advocacy coalition (commercial and recreational fishing and local government officials). These coalitions are principally divided in their preferences to expand MPAs in the California marine waters.

The pro-MPA advocacy coalition is buttressed by the authority of the MLPA to establish MPAs, by scientific evidence, and by the general public. The anti-MPA coalition can mobilize their troops and apply enough pressure on the state government to ensure some influence in the MLPA process. Attempts by the anti-MPA coalition to amend the MLPA will not be possible in the near term, and lawsuits will be considered, if not pursued, if interests are not satisfied in the current collaborative process.

It is too early to tell whether the coalitions are experiencing a hurting stalemate, but their recent attempts to negotiate in a collaborative process indicates some willingness to compromise. Successful negotiations are impeded by a perceived mismatch between problem seriousness and the usefulness of MPAs. On the one hand, both coalitions are concerned about fisheries, but the anti-MPA coalition is skeptical that MPAs will

20 A secondary analysis of the data suggests that the divisions between advocacy coalitions are primarily driven by their policy core policy preference to expand MPAs in California. Policy core policy preferences are beliefs about a policy instrument (MPAs) or proposal that “(i) are subsystem-wide in scope, (ii) are highly salient, and (iii) have been a major source of cleavage for some time” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999, 134). Policy core policy preferences to expand MPAs are closely tied to basic value trade-offs between restrictions on commercial and recreational fishing activities versus the protection of marine resources. This makes preferences to expand MPAs more normative than empirical.
improve fisheries. On the other hand, both coalitions agree that MPAs will benefit ecosystems, but the anti-MPA coalition shows less concern about the degradation of ecosystems. This points negotiations away from fisheries management to ecosystem protection. Successful negotiations might also capitalize on the divisions between recreational fishers and commercial fishers. MPAs that restrict commercial fishing but allow for some recreational fishing will likely align the recreational fishers with the pro-MPA coalition, possibly giving enough political traction to site some MPAs. Likewise, the recreational fishers and some commercial fishers will probably support MPAs that restrict commercial activities with large incidental by-catch (for example, gillnet fisheries) and allow commercial fisheries without by-catch (for example, the sea urchin industry or small-scale kelp harvesting).

CONCLUSIONS

If policy analysts want to be effective in the policy process, they need training that fosters both technical and political astuteness (Radin 2000). This article describes and illustrates how an ACF approach to stakeholder analysis can guide an analyst toward a systematic depiction of a political context, such as the California MLPA conflict.

A common criticism of ACF research is that the results point out the obvious—an outsider can easily identify who is on each side of an issue with very little effort. An ACF stakeholder analysis does more by guiding an analyst toward a systematic evaluation of the different categorizations of stakeholder policy core beliefs, coalition membership, usable resources, and accessible venues. For example, this MLPA stakeholder analysis includes four out of the eleven policy core belief components: policy core policy preferences, policy seriousness, problem causes, and technical usefulness (optimism) of MPAs to achieve objectives. In this article I find that opposing coalitions mostly disagree but sometimes agree across the policy core belief components. For instance, both coalitions strongly disagree about the expansion of MPAs but also agree that MPAs are useful for protecting ecosystems. I also find that, within a coalition, members mostly agree but sometimes disagree across some of the policy core beliefs. For instance, commercial and recreational fishers agree that California fisheries are economically unhealthy but disagree about the seriousness of by-catch as a cause of marine resource problems. The prediction is that negotiated agreements leading to major policy change emerge through capitalizing on commonalities among coalitions or on internal divisions within a coalition. Needed are additional ACF studies that investigate the extent of agreements and disagreements across the different components of policy core beliefs within and among coalitions and that tie the policy core belief commonalities and differences to policy designs and major policy change.

The information coming from an ACF stakeholder analysis will be a resource that serves multiple ends. If the goal is conflict mitigation, an ACF stakeholder analysis will be conducted by policy analysts advocating, or whose client advocates, consensus among competing coalitions. These policy analysts will be policy brokers or a politically neutral consultant, and the resulting information will probably be shared with members from both

21 Because of space and data constraints, I did not look at other components of policy core beliefs such as views of the distribution of authority among government agencies, beliefs regarding the participation of the public and scientific experts, or consideration of the welfare of others in the policy subsystem (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999, 133).
coalitions. For instance, the data from this study were collected by a university researcher with informal ties to both coalitions, initially guided by a stakeholder advisory committee, and shared with members from both coalitions. If the goal is to provide information to help develop successful strategies for a coalition, an ACF stakeholder analysis will be conducted by a policy analyst who is a member of an interest group or think tank within one coalition. However, an opposing coalition will be reluctant to participate in such a study. In this situation, a coalition’s policy analyst will need to conduct an abbreviated ACF stakeholder analysis based on the experiences and contacts of coalition allies and publicly available information. Unless the goal is consensus, an ACF stakeholder analysis is probably too risky for government agency officials. The most likely recipients of an ACF stakeholder analysis are interest group leaders, government sovereigns, agency managers and directors, and other individuals who develop broad, long-term strategies for a policy or program. Regardless of the goals and recipients, additional research is needed to understand how stakeholder analysis (or other political feasibility studies) are conducted and used among stakeholders in policy debates.

This article contributes to the ACF research in at least three ways. First, this article shows how the ACF can be used as a policy analysis tool. The ACF is typically applied as a theory of the policy process wherein it has been applied in over seventy-five case studies from around the world to explain political conflicts and policy change (Sabatier and Weible 2005). This article argues that an ACF stakeholder analysis has a place in the toolbox of policy analysts. The next step is to apply an ACF approach to stakeholder analysis to gauge its utility, especially in the ongoing efforts to implement MPAs in California.

Second, this article highlights several of the underutilized components of the ACF. Traditional approaches to the ACF have focused on policy change, stakeholder beliefs, and coalition membership, with coalition behavior being largely neglected (Mintrom and Vergari 1996; Schlager 1995). One reason for this neglect is that coalition resources, strategies, and venues have not been as clearly defined as actors’ belief systems. This article provides a more detailed discussion of coalition resources and venues with a qualitative illustration within the MLPA policy subsystem. This article, however, falls short in providing a good systematic investigation of resources, strategies, and venues largely because this study’s data were collected based on the extant strengths of the ACF, which included measuring stakeholder beliefs and coalition membership. What is needed is a systematic study using documents, questionnaires, or interviews that focus on coalition behavior with an effort to tie resources with venue shopping activities. Researchers could then work toward greater emphasis on how resources and venues contribute to coalition activities and policy change.

Third, this article adds to the growing number of ACF applications that use network data to identify coalitions (Weible 2005; Weible and Sabatier 2005; Zafonte and Sabatier 1998). It is the first ACF study that compares ally and disagreement networks. When both networks are juxtaposed, the reciprocity of friend and foe is clearer, and central political leaders emerge. For example, most stakeholders disagreed with nongovernment affiliations (scientists, commercial and recreational fishers, and environmental groups), and very few disagreed with government officials. This parallels the ACF’s prediction that government officials will exhibit more moderate political behavior and policy positions than their interest group allies (Sabatier and Zafonte 1999). The next step is to combine quantitative analysis of multiple operationalizations of networks with qualitative interviews to describe and explain stakeholder behavior.
Using the ACF as a basis for stakeholder analysis is not without costs and limitations. A good ACF study includes systematic collection of information through surveys and interviews, which is relatively costly. However, the benefits of conducting a good ACF stakeholder analysis are often underestimated because the longevity of the analysis is longer than many contend. In policy subsystems with high normative conflict and high analytical intractability, traditional, technical policy analysis is most likely ignored (Jenkins-Smith 1990). Under these conditions, the cost of conducting an ACF stakeholder analysis using systematic, scientific methods of data collection and analysis probably warrants the benefits. Given limited resources, the costs in an ACF stakeholder analysis can be reduced with an abbreviated analysis by gathering qualitative data with just a few dozen interviews and by analyzing available documents. However, the loss of systematically collected data in an abbreviated analysis will be felt in trying to identify the different categorizations of policy core beliefs, resources, and venues, greatly reducing the utility of the approach. Another limitation relates to the complexity of the ACF. The ACF is a complicated framework, requiring more than just a few pages in a policy analysis textbook. What is needed is a chapter giving an overview of the ACF and one case study. This is not unreasonable. Many policy analysis textbooks give this same amount of space to other policy analysis techniques such as benefit-cost analysis or multi-criteria analysis (Weimer and Vining 2005). One more disadvantage of conducting an ACF stakeholder analysis is the absence of clearly conceptualized and operationalized institutional variables that structure coalition formation and behavior, as might be found in the institutional analysis and development framework (Ostrom 1990). Institutional factors are consistent with the tenets of the ACF but are largely undefined and underutilized in its current version. There is definitely room in ACF research to develop the theory of how institutions affect coalition activities.

This article contributes to the research and practice of policy analysis by arguing for a greater role of stakeholder analysis. We have yet to develop, test, and refine systematic approaches for understanding political contexts of a policy issue. An ACF stakeholder analysis is one such approach. Researchers are encouraged to apply, test, and refine the ACF and other public policy frameworks as tools for understanding political systems in policy analysis.

REFERENCES


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