



Review Article

From good practice to policy formation—The impact of third sector on disaster management in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Using the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) first developed by Sabatier and Jenkins (1987, 1988) as a conceptual lens, this paper explores its usefulness in understanding policy changes in the context of disaster management in Taiwan. The 921 Alliance and the 88 Alliance formed in light of two natural disasters were subjects of analyses. Overall, the ACF is an effective tool in analyzing Taiwan's policy changes in response to natural disasters, especially regarding the importance of *policy core beliefs* in reinforcing the cohesiveness of coalitions and their drive to influence government's decisions. Yet, this paper argues that a critical attribution within the two coalitions was that of social capital, an aspect that the originally ACF as posited by Sabatier conceptually lacks. The impacts of 921 and 88 Alliances on Taiwan's civil society development are also discussed.

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1. Introduction

The discourse on cross-sector collaborations in the production of welfare services has warranted much scholarly attention in recent years. Less, however, is known about how these collaborations lead to policy formation, and this is especially so in the context of disaster management. In this analysis, the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) developed by Sabatier [33,34] is used as the conceptual lens through which two cases of severe natural disasters are analyzed in Taiwan: the 1999 Chi-Chi earthquake and Typhoon Morakot in 2009. This paper examines how non-profit organizations (NPOs) mobilized their resources, and formed alliances to provide a variety of social services for disaster victims. The role of professional social workers as both service providers and policy advocates is highlighted, as well as the importance of social capital inherent in civil society as a critical attribute that shaped the success of alliances. The analysis finds that by strategically advocating for political and social change, these alliances pressured and persuaded the Taiwanese government to pass a series of legislation designed to enable Taiwan to better respond to future natural disasters. The occurrence of two severe natural disasters, along with the processes within the third-sector subsystem facilitated the third-sector coalitions to push for policy change. The following analysis explores the limitations of the alliances are discussed as well as the broader implications for government-third sector relations.

2. The advocacy coalition framework

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) was first developed by Sabatier to explain the stability and change of policies. Since its inception, there have been various revisions to the framework [43,45]. Nonetheless, the underlying premise and components of the ACF remain intact. Generally, the ACF rests on five premises:

- (1) Scientific and technical knowledge play critical roles in policy process;
- (2) Understanding policy change requires a time perspective of ten years or more;
- (3) Policy subsystems should be used as the primary unit of analysis in the study of policy change;
- (4) The subsystem should be expanded to include actors not only from the traditional iron triangles, but also officials from all levels of government, consultants, scientists, and members of the media;
- (5) Policies and programs can be perceived as reflections and translations of beliefs.

[35].

The ACF explicitly identifies *beliefs* as the causal factor for political behavior [45]. According to Sabatier and Weible [38], belief systems comprise two levels of beliefs: the first and most fundamental of which are *deep core*

beliefs. Largely resting on personal normative values, examples include individual beliefs on human nature, and views on the role of government, all of which are difficult to alter. The second level of the belief system is *policy core beliefs*, which refer to normative preferences pertaining to the appropriate means and ends of public policy [36]. Examples may include one's perception of the appropriate role and division of authority between government and markets. Proponents of the ACF claim that *policy core beliefs* are the foundation for forming coalitions, alliances and coordinating activities among members of a subsystem [10]. Thus, policy change is perceived as the result of a coalition's efforts in transforming their ideas, norms and beliefs into official actions [39].

At its original inception, advocates of the ACF identified two possible ways through which policy change can be achieved. The first is through *external subsystem events*, which are defined as shifts in the policy core attributes and beliefs resulting from events such as large-scale changes in socioeconomic conditions and governing coalitions [36]. The second catalyst for policy change is through the *policy-oriented learning processes* within and between advocacy coalitions [10]. [36]: 123 defined policy-oriented learning as "relatively enduring alterations of thought or behavioral intentions that result from experience and/or new information and that are concerned with the attainment or revision of policy objectives". Coalitions are also characterized as being suspicious of other coalitions due to the tendencies to exaggerate the influence and maliciousness of opponents, which in turn reinforces and strengthens their own ties with people who share similar beliefs [37].

The ACF has been revised to include two additional paths through which policy change can be achieved [38]. The third path consists of internal subsystem events that highlight current deficiencies of the subsystem and therefore prompt coalitions to change their behaviors, and the fourth path posits that policy change occurs through negotiation and agreements by two or more competing coalitions [2,45].

One of the major advantages of the ACF is its departure from traditional state-centered and pluralist approaches towards policy change analysis. Instead of being overly linear and deterministic, advocates of this framework acknowledge the power of political elites and administrative stakeholders, yet argue that there are other interveners and social forces that can influence decisions [4,16]. In recent years, ACF scholars proposed two additional variables to explain coalition formation and policy change: the degree of consensus needed for major policy change and openness of political system [38]. This is partly due to criticisms from scholars who find the ACF inappropriate in examining policy change in European contexts due to its different political system from the US [21,13]. As such, the rationale behind the former variable is that in situations where a high degree of consent is required (i.e. a democracy) to affect policy change, there are greater incentives for coalition to work together, and compromise.

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