

Article

Have advocacy coalitions been difference-making in Canadian policy processes? Evidence from firearms policy processes in the 1970s and 1990s

B. Timothy Heinmiller
Brock University

Abstract

This paper investigates whether advocacy coalitions can have much policy influence in Canadian policy processes, where decision-making power tends to be highly centralized in the executive. The question is investigated through a diachronic case study of firearms policy-making that compares policy processes in 1976-77 and 1994-95 using a most-similar logic. Content analysis and social network analysis show that the 1976-77 process involved only a gun rights advocacy coalition, while the 1994-95 process involved both gun rights and gun control advocacy coalitions. Comparative analysis further shows that these advocacy coalitions had difference-making influence in these policy processes, contributing to the adoption of relatively minor gun control reforms in 1977 and major reforms in 1995.

Résumé

Cet article vise à déterminer si les coalitions plaidantes peuvent faire la différence dans l'élaboration des politiques au Canada, pays où le pouvoir exécutif tend à exercer un grand contrôle sur la prise de décisions. À travers une étude diachronique des politiques sur les armes à feu, l'article utilise une logique de similitude pour comparer l'élaboration des politiques de 1976-77 et de 1994-95. Les analyses de contenu et des réseaux sociaux démontrent qu'en 1976-77 seule une coalition plaidante sur les droits aux armes à feu avait influencé l'élaboration de ces politiques alors qu'en 1994-95 les coalitions plaidantes ayant trait aux droits aux armes à feu et au contrôle des armes à feu les avaient influencées. De surcroît, l'analyse comparative indique que ces coalitions plaidantes firent la différence dans l'élaboration des politiques sur les armes à feu puisqu'elles donnèrent lieu à l'adoption de réformes relativement mineures en 1977 et de réformes majeures en 1995.

Keywords: Advocacy Coalition Framework, Canada, most-similar comparison, firearms policy, content analysis, network analysis

Mots-clés : cadre de la coalition de plaidoyer, Canada, comparaison la plus semblable, analyse de contenu, l'analyse des réseaux

Introduction

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), and several other policy process theories, conceptually distinguish between macropolitical systems and specialized policy subsystems. Macropolitical systems are the domain of popular and electoral politics and encompass all policy areas, while policy subsystems are the domain of bureaucrats, civil society actors, and interested politicians who focus their efforts in a particular policy area. Policy subsystems and subsystem actors are assumed to be influential in policy development, as in the ACF assumption that subsystem actors gravitate into one or more advocacy coalitions that influence policy. Policy subsystems are nested within macropolitical systems so that changing conditions, events, and understandings in the macropolitical realm filter to policy

subsystems and reshape them, so that both systemic and sub-systemic factors are influential in determining policy outcomes.

However, some democratic systems centralize a great deal of policy-making power in their executives, and, in these systems, it is reasonable to question whether sub-systemic actors, such as advocacy coalitions, have much policy influence. Research consistently shows that the Canadian Westminster system centralizes a lot of political power in the prime minister and their inner circle, especially in majority governments. Several studies have identified advocacy coalitions in Canadian policy subsystems and identified them as influential policy actors; yet, the extent of their policy influence has not been conclusively established because it is identified in conjunction with various systemic factors that were also influential, such as changes in government, shifts in public opinion, and changes in media coverage. Given these conjunctions of factors influencing policy decisions and the considerable concentration of policy decision-making power in the centre of Canadian government, some have questioned whether advocacy coalitions have much influence policy in Canada or whether they are mere window dressing for other factors at the systemic level (Heinmiller & Hennigar, 2022). This question is not only relevant to Canada, but to all democratic systems with powerful executives.

This question of advocacy coalition influence in centralized political systems is taken up here through a diachronic case study of Canadian firearms policy-making. A most similar comparison is constructed using historical policy processes from 1976–77 and 1994–95 to isolate and identify the influence of advocacy coalitions on policy outcomes. The paper shows that the 1976-77 policy process featured only a gun rights coalition while the 1994-95 process involved both a gun rights coalition and a gun control coalition. Moreover, several systemic factors are (relatively) constant in the comparison, suggesting that the variance in advocacy coalitions was difference-making in the policy outcomes.

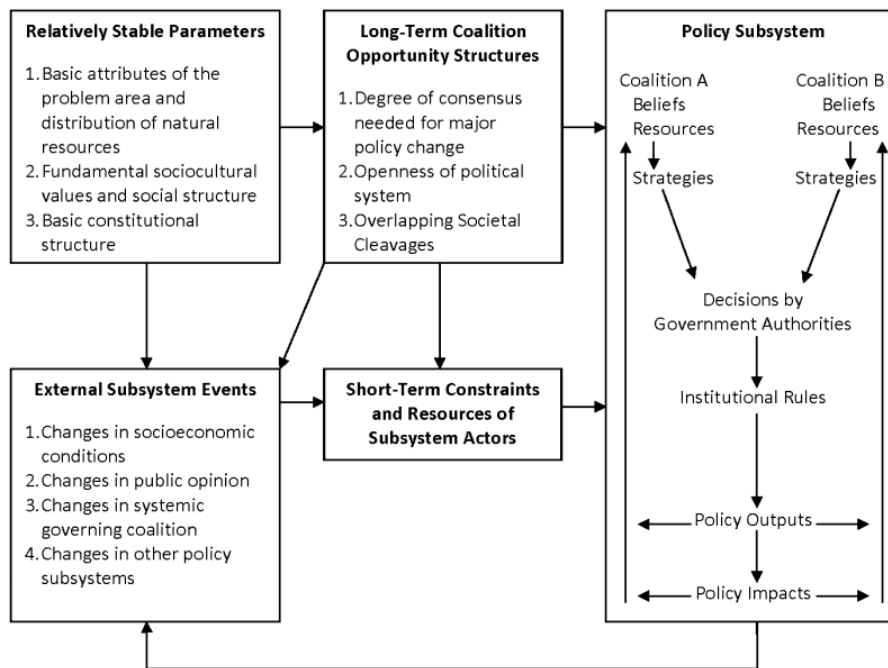
The first section of the paper describes the ACF, advocacy coalitions, and current evidence of their influence in Canadian policy-making. The second and third sections outline the paper's methodology, starting with its comparative method and then its data collection and analysis procedures. The empirical results are presented in sections four and five, beginning with the advocacy coalitions present in each policy process, followed by an examination of their policy influence. The final section discusses the generalizability of the findings and their implications.

Advocacy Coalitions and Policy Change in Canada

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) assumes that most policy-relevant activity takes place within specialized policy subsystems, and that subsystems are nested within larger macropolitical systems. This is shown in the ACF flow diagram in Figure 1 as systemic factors (on the left side of the diagram) are conceptualized as influencing policy subsystem dynamics (on the right side of the diagram), with subsystems producing policy outcomes. Policy subsystems are characterized by one or more advocacy coalitions, defined as groups of actors sharing policy core beliefs and collaborating to have their shared beliefs instated in policy (Sabatier & Weible, 2007, p. 196). Competition, and sometimes collaboration, between the prevailing advocacy coalitions is key to understanding policy development and the policy outcomes produced (Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Weible, & Ingold, 2018). Systemic changes, particularly in the relatively stable parameters and external subsystem events, are

important to understanding policy development as these can impact coalition beliefs, resources, and strategies, and thereby influence policy outcomes. Systemic events shape policy-making, but policy subsystems and the advocacy coalitions therein are mediating factors.

Figure 1. Flow Diagram of the Advocacy Coalition Framework



Source: Weible, et al (2011, 352)

The ACF was developed by American scholars with the decentralized US political system in mind, but it has since been applied to all kinds of political systems, including highly centralized democratic systems such as Canada. Research has shown that power is highly centralized in the centre of Canadian government, which is usually defined as the prime minister and their inner circle of trusted advisors and ministers (Savoie, 1999) (Bakvis & Wolinetz, 2005). There is some debate about the extent of centralization (Brodie, 2018), but it is generally recognized that decision-making power is more centralized in the Canadian government than in most democratic systems. With such a concentration of policy-making power, it is reasonable to question whether advocacy coalitions in Canadian policy subsystems, which are rather remote from the centre of government and have gatekeepers standing between them and the decision-makers at the centre, actually have much influence in Canadian policy-making.

Studies have identified advocacy coalitions in a variety of policy subsystems in Canada at both the federal and provincial levels. This body of work includes: Mawhinney's (1993) chapter on Ontario education policy; Lertzman, Rayner and Wilson's (1996) article on BC forestry policy; Litfin's (2000) work on Canadian climate change policy; Jegen and Audet's (2011) paper on Quebec wind energy policy; Bratt's (2012) book on federal and provincial nuclear energy policy; Heinmiller's (2013) (2016) studies of Alberta water policy; Swigger and Heinmiller's (2014) article on Ontario mental health policy; Stritch's (2015) work on federal labour policy; Montpetit, Lachapelle, and Harvey's (2016) study of BC and Quebec

fracking policy; Heinmiller and Pirak's (2017) work on Ontario land use policy; Howe, Tindall and Stoddart's (2021) study of Canadian climate change policy; and, Heinmiller and Hennigar's (2022) analysis of Canadian firearms policy.

Yet, the policy influence of advocacy coalitions in Canadian policy-making remains in question as, in several studies, the efforts of advocacy coalitions have coincided with systemic factors that could explain policy outcomes all on their own. For example, an environmental coalition was present when Ontario's *Greenbelt Act* was passed in 2005 (Heinmiller & Pirak, 2017), but the election of a majority Liberal government in 2003 may have been sufficient for policy reform, and the environmental coalition could have been a marginal or irrelevant factor. Similarly, an environmental coalition was prevalent in the federal decision to introduce a national carbon tax in 2018 (Howe, Tindall, & Stoddart, 2021), but the decisive factor may have been the Liberals' majority election victory in 2015. In a previous study of gun control, it was shown that a gun control coalition was prominent in the introduction of universal firearms registration in 1995 and a gun rights coalition was central in its repeal in 2012; but, so were the election of majority Liberal and majority Conservative governments in 1993 and 2011, respectively, and it is unclear how much influence the advocacy coalitions may have had on these policy outcomes (Heinmiller & Hennigar, 2022). In Quebec, negative media coverage and declining public support for fracking were identified, in conjunction with an anti-fracking coalition, as operative in the province's decision to impose a fracking moratorium in 2011 but the relative influence of these factors is undetermined (Montpetit, Lachapelle, & Harvey, 2016). Thus, whether advocacy coalitions have much influence in Canadian policy-making remains an open question, as various systemic factors may bypass or overwhelm the influence of advocacy coalitions and shape the decisions of powerful policy-makers at the centre of government.

This paper addresses the question of advocacy coalition policy influence in Canada by comparing two Canadian firearms policy processes, in 1976-77 and 1994-95.

While the 1994-95 policy process has been studied extensively, the 1976-77 policy process has not. The adoption of the 1995 *Firearms Act* (described below) has been analyzed from various perspectives, by Rathjen and Montpetit (1999), Pal (2003), Bottomley (2004), Fleming (2012), and Brown (2012). Heinmiller and Hennigar (2022) have studied it from an ACF perspective and, using organizational analysis, argue that the process featured two advocacy coalitions, a gun rights coalition and a gun control coalition. Only Brown (2012) has examined the 1976-77 policy process in any detail and no one has investigated it for the presence of advocacy coalitions. Multiple authors note the presence of gun owners' organizations in the 1970s and the absence of organizations dedicated to gun control in Canada until 1990 (Bottomley, 2004, p. 21) (Brown, 2012, p. 204). This suggests that only a gun rights coalition was present in the 1976-77 policy process, but this is a hypothesis requiring empirical verification. Accordingly, the following hypothesis (H1) is investigated:

H1: The Canadian firearms policy subsystem changed from a unitary structure dominated by a gun rights coalition in the 1976-77 policy process, to an adversarial structure characterized by opposing gun rights and gun control coalitions in the 1994-95 policy process.

Assuming this hypothesis is verified, comparing the processes provides variance in the configuration of advocacy coalitions in the policy subsystem while holding several important systemic factors constant. Furthermore, because the 1976-77 policy process produced

relatively minor gun control reforms and the 1994-95 process produced major gun control reforms, an association between the presence of a gun control coalition and the adoption of major gun control reforms can be inferred. This hypothesis is tested as H2, which proposes:

H2: The advocacy coalitions present in the firearms policy subsystem was a difference-making factor in the adoption of minor gun control reforms in 1976-77 and major gun control reforms in 1994-95.

The potential difference-making effects of the advocacy coalitions were assessed through structured comparison of the two policy processes and the next section elaborates on this comparative methodology.

Comparative Method and Cases

Comparing historical Canadian firearms policy processes in 1976-77 and 1994-95 provides what Gerring (2007) calls a diachronic case study. This is a single case (Canadian firearms policy) using a within-case comparison across two or more time periods (1976-77 and 1994-95). George and Bennett refer to this as the “before-after” research design in which a single longitudinal case is divided into two sub-cases and compared (George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 166-7). The sub-cases here are Canadian firearms policy-making before the presence of a gun control advocacy coalition (1976-77) and after the presence of a gun control advocacy coalition (1994-95). Comparing these historical policy processes holds (relatively) constant a range of background and potentially confounding factors so that, using a most-similar comparative logic, the policy influence of the advocacy coalitions can be better isolated. (George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 166-7).

In comparing the sub-cases, one looks for “...difference-making evidence, which shows that differences in values of X [the configuration of advocacy coalitions] produce differences in values of Y [firearms policy outcomes] across a set of comparable cases, where all other potential causes of differences are kept constant” (Beach & Pedersen, 2016, pp. 159-60). The 1976-77 and 1994-95 firearms policy processes were selected to facilitate such a comparison: the policy processes took place in similar political systems, but the advocacy coalitions in the firearms policy subsystem varied, and the processes produced different policy outcomes. Comparing these historical policy processes, despite the challenges involved, provided an opportunity for structured comparison that is unavailable in comparing more contemporary firearms policy processes which have involved both gun control and gun rights coalitions. Several other Canadian firearms policy processes in recent history were considered, such as the failure of Bill C-80 in 1990, the passage of Bill C-17 in 1991, and the passage of Bill C-19 in 2012, but they did not fit the requirements of a most-similar comparison.

The 1976-77 policy process featured two government bills, Bills C-83 and C-51. Introduced in early 1976, Bill C-83 was an omnibus crime bill that would have created a universal licensing system for gun users, including existing users (Brown, 2012, p. 190). Bill C-83 was allowed to die on the order paper when Parliament was prorogued later in the year and the government followed-up with Bill C-51 in 1977 (Brown, 2012, p. 189). Bill C-51 abandoned universal licensing and proposed that new gun users – but not existing ones – be required to obtain a Firearms Acquisition Certificate (FAC) before purchasing firearms (Brown, 2012, p. 190). The FAC system regulated new gun users but was more modest in

scope than what had been originally proposed in Bill C-83. Universal gun registration was debated in the 1970s, and proposed in Bill S-14, a private member's bill by Senator Donald Cameron in 1974, but it was not pursued by the government (Canadian Press, 1975c).

The 1994-95 policy process involved a single bill, Bill C-68, which included provisions for both universal gun user licensing and universal gun registration. While some minor amendments were made to the bill during its development, Bill C-68 passed into law as the *Firearms Act* in late 1995 with the universal licensing and registration requirements intact. The subsequent implementation of the universal registry would be plagued with problems and cost overruns and the registration of long-guns, though not the licensing of long-gun users, was eventually scrapped by the Harper Conservatives in 2012. While it existed, however, universal licensing and registration was the apex of gun control by the Canadian state (Brown, 2012).

Thus, the 1976-77 and 1994-95 policy processes produced different policy outcomes: the former introduced licensing of new firearms users only, while the latter introduced universal licensing of all firearms users and universal registration of all firearms. By comparison, the 1994-95 policy reform (in Bill C-68) was far more extensive than the 1976-77 policy reform (in Bill C-51).

Nevertheless, the two policy outcomes were produced under systemic conditions with many substantial similarities. Many of the systemic conditions that shape policy subsystems are outlined in the ACF flow diagram in Figure 1, specifically in the 'Relatively Stable Parameters' and 'External Subsystem Events'. The relatively stable parameters include the basic attributes of a policy problem, the fundamental sociocultural values and social structure, and the basic constitutional attributes of a political system. External subsystem events refer to changes in socioeconomic conditions, changes in public opinion, changes in systemic governing coalitions, and changes in other policy subsystems, any of which can exert a substantial influence on policy-making. These categories allow for a structured comparison of the systemic contexts of the 1976-77 and 1994-95 firearms policy processes, beginning with their several similarities.

Between 1976-77 and 1994-95, the basic constitutional attributes of Canadian firearms governance were unchanged. Firearms policy in both periods fell under the federal criminal law power in section 91 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* and, although the provinces could regulate firearms in areas that touched their jurisdiction, federal laws superseded them (Supreme Court of Canada, 2000). Consequently, the federal government was the main venue for firearms policy-making in both periods. Canada entrenched the Charter of Rights and Freedoms through the *Constitution Act, 1982*, but the Charter did not entrench a constitutional right to firearms as the Bill of Rights did in the United States (Supreme Court of Canada, 2000). Parliament's authority to regulate firearms was unchanged, so the two policy processes took place within similar constitutional contexts. Furthermore, Savoie (1999) documents the onset of highly centralized government in Canada from the late 1960s onward, so this important institutional feature was present in both policy processes.

The policy problems addressed in the 1976-77 and 1994-95 policy processes were similar, as much of the debate centred on the regulation of long-guns. Since 1968, Canadian firearms regulations had distinguished between three categories of firearms: prohibited firearms, such as most automatic weaponry, could not be privately owned; restricted firearms, such as handguns and many types of semi-automatic weapons, could be privately owned but had to be federally registered; and, unrestricted firearms, such as the long-guns

used by most hunters, farmers, and sport shooters, had no licensing or registration requirements (Pal, 2003, pp. 246-47). Long-guns constituted by far the largest group of firearms in Canada (Gabor, 1997, p. 3) (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1997), and there was considerable controversy in both periods about whether long-guns were inherently dangerous, whether long-gun users should be licensed, and whether long-guns should be registered.

Importantly, the systemic governing coalitions in both periods were Liberal majority governments and the Liberals were friendly to gun control, though they had some dissenting MPs from western and rural constituencies. Media reports indicate that as many as 30 of the 177 members of the Liberal caucus opposed gun controls in 1994-95 (Canadian Press, 1995, p. N4); no comparable estimate is available for 1976-77. In neither process was the dissenting group large enough to block the Liberal caucus from pursuing new gun control reforms in Parliament, which is an important similarity. The Liberals could also count on some gun control support from opposition members in the third-party New Democratic Party (NDP) in 1976-77 (Manthorpe, 1975) (Canadian Press, 1976) and the official opposition Bloc Quebecois (BQ) in the 1994-95 (Tanh Ha, 1994). While the latter parliament was more friendly to gun control overall, the Liberals, in both cases, could reasonably count on some opposition support in the House to offset the dissenters in their own caucus. This made the passage of gun control reforms feasible in both cases.

The two Liberal governments were also responding to similar levels of public demand, as public opinion in both periods was overwhelmingly supportive of new and stringent gun control measures, including universal registration. A Gallup poll in August 1975 found 83% of respondents in favour of universal registration (Doney, 1975, p. A3), while Angus Reid polls in 1993 and 1995 found 86% and 71% support for universal registration, respectively (Cukier, 1994, p. A25) (Tanh Ha, 1995, p. A2). Thus, the different policy outcomes in 1976-77 and 1994-95 cannot be attributed to a shift in public opinion.

The main systemic differences between the policy processes were changes in sociocultural values and socioeconomic conditions, both of which contributed to the formation of a gun control advocacy coalition in 1990. Some of the most relevant and documented Canadian sociocultural value changes between the 1970s and 1990s included an increased demand for public participation in governance (Nevitte, 1996), and the rise of social justice and rights discourses (Kelly, 2005). Both periods experienced vivid instances of gun violence that shocked the Canadian public, but within different sociocultural contexts. Brown (2012, pp. 167-169) identifies several instances of gun violence in the 1970s that motivated the push for gun controls: rising violent crime rates, the FLQ crisis in 1970, the murder of police officers in Toronto in 1973 and Moncton in 1974, two school shootings in Brampton and Ottawa in 1975, and a random sniper attack in Toronto in 1976. Similarly, the Montreal Massacre in 1989, the Concordia University shooting in 1992, and a series of high-profile shootings in late 1993 and early 1994 motivated the pursuit of gun control reforms in the mid-1990s. The Montreal Massacre, however, was a singular event as the shooter targeted female students at a Montreal post-secondary institution, killing 14 and injuring 14 in Canada's worst mass shooting to that point. Thereafter, gun control in Canada became closely linked with the feminist movement, and it was women who formed and led the Canadian Coalition for Gun Control in 1990, the nucleus of the first gun control advocacy coalition. Thus, changing sociocultural values and the Montreal Massacre itself distinguish the 1994-95 process from the 1976-77 process and were key in the formation of a gun

control advocacy coalition in 1990. These different contexts may have also made gun control more salient in the 1990s than in the 1970s, though this is not reflected in the public opinion data cited above.

Overall, the 1976-77 and 1994-95 firearms policy processes provide an opportune diachronic case study with a most similar comparative logic. The processes took place in the same constitutional context, with similar governments in power (Liberal majorities), responding to similar levels of public support (strong support for gun control), in addressing a similar policy problem (the regulation of long-guns and long-gun users). Some relevant changes in sociocultural values took place between the processes and this, along with the Montreal Massacre in 1989, was important in linking gun control with feminism and in forming Canada's first gun control advocacy coalition in 1990.

Data Collection and Analysis

Advocacy coalitions were operationalized by identifying the actors in the Canadian firearms policy subsystem and documenting their collaboration efforts and policy core beliefs over the 1968-95 period.

The overall strategy was similar to that used by Matti and Sandström (2013) and Gronow and Ylä-Anttila (2019) who identified collaboration networks first, then evaluated the extent to which actors in the collaboration networks shared policy core beliefs. Data on both variables were generated from a set of contemporaneous newspaper articles, as used in several previous ACF studies (Olofsson, Katz, Costie, Heikkila, & Weible, 2018; Heikkila, Berardo, Weible, & Yi, 2019). The articles were drawn from the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, Canada's largest circulating national newspaper. The *Globe and Mail* was selected because of its reputation for credible reporting and because its centre/centre-right editorial orientation made it more likely to report on all sides of firearms policy issues than other newspapers leaning further left or right.

Two content analyses of the article set were undertaken, one coding for advocacy-related actor collaborations and one coding for actor policy core beliefs.

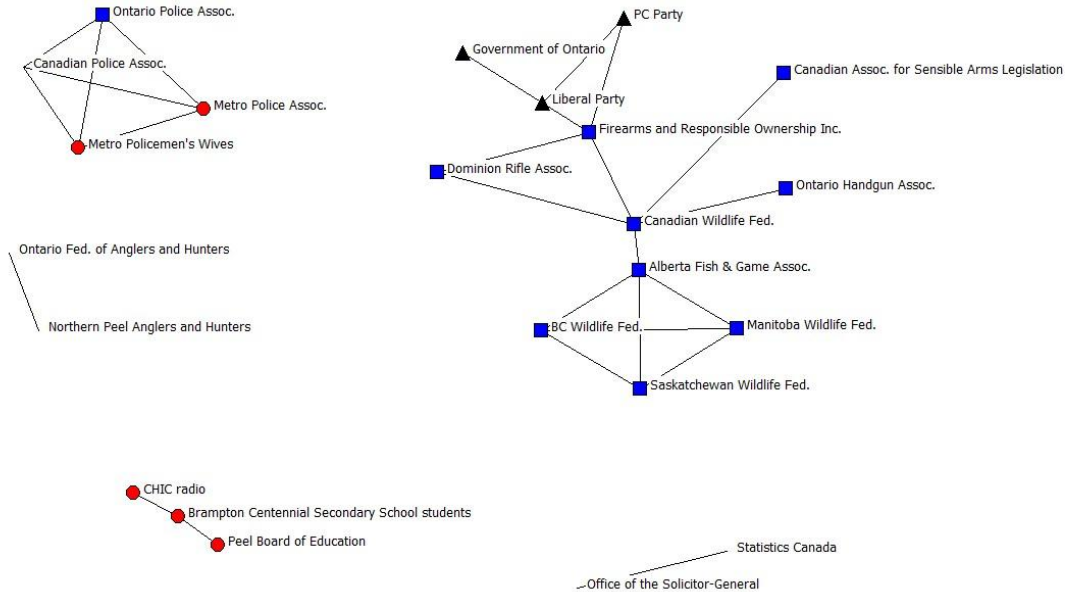
The collaboration content analysis identified all reported instances of actors trying to advocate for a firearms policy, then coded each instance to determine whether collaboration was present and, if so, the actors collaborating. The list of advocacy coalition strategic actions in Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999, p. 142) was used as a non-exhaustive reference list to identify advocacy-related actions in the articles. Two independent coders then coded the actions for collaborations, achieving a Krippendorff's alpha of .94, indicating a high level of inter-coder reliability (Krippendorff, 2018). Using these data, actor X actor adjacency matrices were constructed in UCINET, one for the 1968-77 period and one for the 1989-95 period. Collaborations were identified at the organizational level and the adjacency matrices were undirected, symmetrical, and binary. Collaboration networks were investigated by using UCINET to identify components and blocks in the matrices (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005, p. chapter 11; Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2018). Components are groups of actors who are connected to each other but not connected to others, constituting separate parts of a larger network. In more highly connected networks, where components may not exist, blocks can be identified by looking for cut points: these are nodes in a network that, if removed, divide a network into disconnected parts.

The core beliefs content analysis was based on Leifeld's (2013) discourse network analysis, a common technique in ACF research (Kukkonen, Ylä-Anttila, & Broadbent, 2017; Kukkonen, et al., 2018; Schmid, Sewerin, & Schmidt, 2019). The analysis of core beliefs focused on policy core policy preferences, which are "...normative beliefs that project an image of how the policy subsystem ought to be, provide the vision that guides coalition strategic behaviour, and helps unite allies and divide opponents" (Sabatier & Weible, 2007, p. 195). Policy core policy preferences were conceptualized as actors (individuals and/or organizations) taking positions (supporting or opposing) on various policy concepts (screening firearms users, punishing gun crimes, registering firearms, prohibiting firearms, regulating the storage and usage of firearms, and undertaking gun control in general). Two independent coders achieved Krippendorff's alpha scores of .84 for policy concepts and .85 for policy positions, indicating high levels of inter-coder reliability (Krippendorff, 2018). The data were divided into the 1968-77 and 1989-95 periods and analyzed at the organizational level. Composite variables for each period were created based on policy preferences that were strongly correlated and statistically significant at the .01 level. The composites served as indicators of actors' overall disposition to firearms. Based on their composite scores, actors were identified as having either gun rights beliefs, gun control beliefs, or ambivalent beliefs. These actor dispositions were then mapped onto the previously identified collaboration networks, to observe whether components and blocks had internally consistent core beliefs, indicating the presence of advocacy coalitions. These network diagrams are shown in the next section as Figures 2 and 3.

H1 Results: Advocacy Coalitions in the 1976-77 and 1994-95 Firearms Policy Processes

As expected, the data indicate that only a gun rights coalition was present in the 1976-77 policy process. The network data for this period show five components in the firearms policy subsystem, as illustrated in Figure 2. However, two of these components are isolated dyads so they can be ruled out as advocacy coalitions. Two other components were relatively small and consisted mostly of actors holding gun control beliefs. One of these involved police and police supporters in Toronto undertaking a petition for more gun control in February 1973 (Policemen's Wives Take Over Battle Husbands Can't Fight, 1973), and the other involved students at a Brampton high school, the Peel school board, and a local radio station advocating for more gun control after a shooting at the school in May 1975 (Petition Asks for Tougher Laws on Weapons, 1975). These pockets of collaboration show that some gun control advocates were present in the 1970s but were disconnected in time and space. Accordingly, there is no evidence supporting the existence of a gun control advocacy coalition in 1976-77, and it seems very unlikely that the *Globe and Mail* would consistently fail to report the presence of this coalition while simultaneously reporting the presence of a gun rights coalition, as described next.

Figure 2. The Canadian Firearms Policy Subsystem, 1968-77



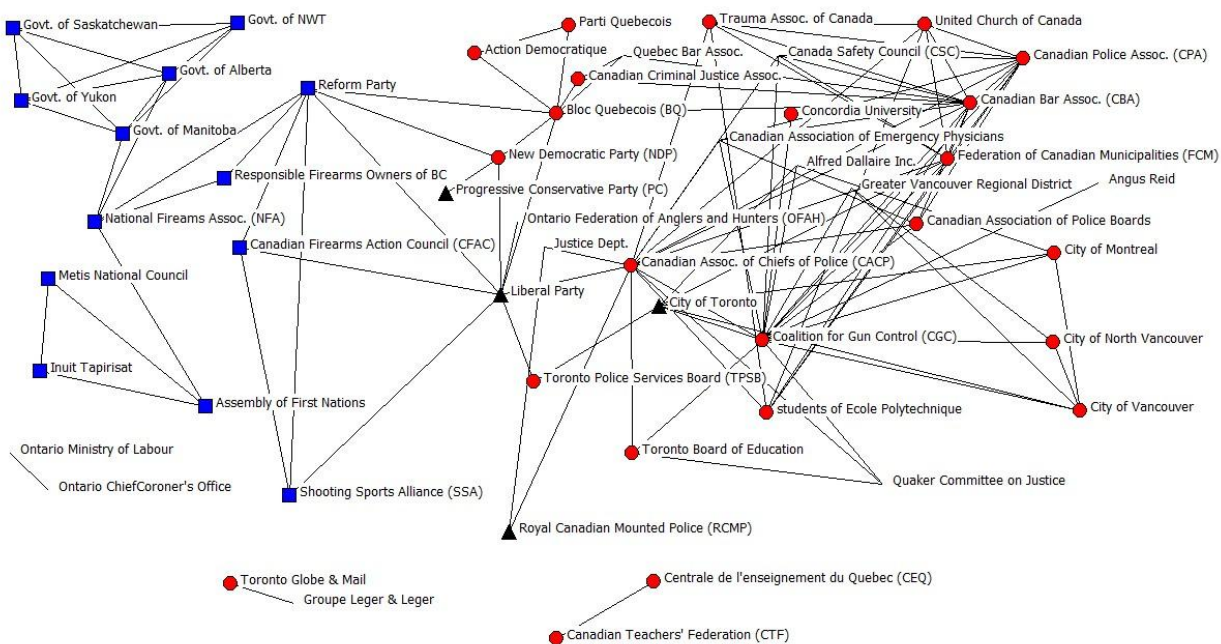
Red circular nodes = gun control actors; blue square nodes = gun rights actors; black triangular nodes = mixed/ambivalent actors; no nodes = no core belief data available

The largest component of the 1970s subsystem is a network of actors holding mostly gun rights beliefs, and it fits the criteria of an advocacy coalition. One of the central actors in this component was the Canadian Wildlife Federation which appears to have played an important role connecting provincial hunting and angling groups, with various national gun organizations in resisting new gun controls. Another important actor was the Canadian Association for Sensible Arms Legislation (CASAL) which formed in 1976 to act as an umbrella organization for gun rights actors during the Bill C-83 and C-51 processes (Brown, 2012, pp. 177-179). The only actors in the component not holding unambiguously gun rights beliefs were the Liberal and Progressive Conservative (PC) parties whose caucuses had individuals falling on both sides of the gun control issue. Data on individual actors (not shown in Figure 2) shows that ties between the parties and the gun rights organizations were through individual MPs with gun rights beliefs. Also note that most collaborative ties in this component were between actors with similar beliefs, and there were no ties between actors with opposing beliefs. This suggests that belief similarity and collaborative ties are closely associated, as one would expect in an advocacy coalition, and supports the conclusion that this component constituted a gun rights coalition.

As also anticipated in H1, the network and core belief data show the presence of both a gun rights and a gun control coalition in 1994-95. There are four components in this data, three isolated dyads and one very large and interconnected network, as shown in Figure 3.

As before, the three isolated dyads can be ruled out as advocacy coalitions, shifting focusing to the large network that connects 47 of the 53 actors identified in the policy subsystem.

Figure 3. The Canadian Firearms Policy Subsystem, 1989-95



Red circular nodes = gun control actors; blue square nodes = gun rights actors; black triangular nodes = mixed/ambivalent actors; no nodes = no core belief data available

The network was investigated using UCINET's cut points algorithm to identify actors that, if removed, would divide the network into blocks. The cut points algorithm identified seven potential cut points, four of which were political parties: the Liberal Party, Reform Party, NDP, and BQ. These cut points are notable because they are the only ties between one block of actors sharing gun rights beliefs and another block of actors sharing gun control beliefs. In other words, these political parties were the few points of connection between gun rights and gun control actors, either because two parties with different core beliefs collaborated at some point, or because a single party had individual actors with opposing core beliefs. If the political parties are removed, the gun rights and gun control blocks remain internally connected but become disconnected from each other and, within these blocks, there are no collaboration ties between actors with opposing beliefs. This suggests that, apart from some ties through political parties, the gun rights and gun control blocks were distinct and separate, probably constituting advocacy coalitions.

The other cut points identified by UCINET were the National Firearms Association, the Coalition for Gun Control, and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, likely indicating the importance of these actors in internally connecting their respective advocacy coalitions (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005, p. chapter 11). The National Firearms Association was one of the leading voices in the gun rights coalition and was an important connector in that coalition between the hunting groups, firearms groups, western provincial and territorial governments, and Indigenous peoples who opposed further gun control, for various reasons (Somerset, 2016). The Coalition for Gun Control was undoubtedly a central actor in the gun control coalition, serving as both an advocacy group and an umbrella organization for a large

coalition of supporters that included police groups, bar associations, public safety organizations, doctor's groups, students, educators, women's organizations, city governments, and others (Coalition for Gun Control, 2005). The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police was active in the gun control coalition and seems to have played an important part in connecting police groups to other parts of that coalition.

Overall, the network and core beliefs data support H1: there is ample evidence the Canadian firearms policy subsystem of 1976-77 was dominated by a gun rights coalition, while the 1994-95 subsystem featured both gun rights and gun control coalitions. This justifies a comparison of the two policy processes – which are otherwise quite similar – to investigate whether the shift in coalition configurations was difference-making in shaping firearms policy outcomes.

H2 Results: Advocacy Coalitions and Firearms Policy Outcomes

H2 is evaluated based on whether the different advocacy coalitions present in the 1976-77 and 1994-95 policy processes were difference-making in the policy outcomes resulting from these processes. Overall, the comparison supports the advocacy coalitions as difference-making in policy formulation and decision-making, but not in agenda-setting.

The comparison shows little evidence of the advocacy coalitions as difference-making in the processes' agenda-setting, though their agenda-setting influence cannot be ruled out. In both processes, the governing Liberals decided to pursue major gun control reforms in Parliament: Bills C-83 sought universal licensing in 1976 and Bill C-68 sought universal licensing and registration in 1994. The absence of a gun control coalition in 1976 indicates that it was factor(s) other than the work of an advocacy coalition that motivated the Liberals to pursue major gun controls, at this time. The presence of a gun control coalition may have influenced the Liberals' decision to pursue major gun controls in 1994, and to pursue both universal licensing and registration rather than just universal licensing as they had in the 1970s. However, since major gun control reforms were put on the policy agenda when a gun control coalition was both absent in the 1970s and present in the 1990s, the coalitions' influence on agenda-setting was not unambiguously difference-making.

The difference-making effect of the advocacy coalitions is more apparent in policy formulation and decision-making, particularly in the Liberals' decisions to abandon or follow through on their gun control proposals. Both Bill C-83 in 1976 and Bill C-68 in 1994 sparked stiff resistance from gun rights coalitions, who attacked the efficacy of the reforms and mounted intense political pressure on the Liberals to abandon them. With vocal minorities of Liberal MPs already opposed to further gun controls – some of them even working with the gun rights coalition – Liberal leaders, cabinets, and caucuses faced difficult decisions: invest the time, energy, and political capital necessary to push through major gun control reforms in the face of resistance or abandon them in favour of other policy priorities. Liberals in 1976-77 faced a policy subsystem dominated by the gun rights coalition and could find few political or intellectual allies to support or justify continuing the pursuit of major reforms. Liberals in 1994-95, in contrast, faced a policy subsystem with intense pressure and evidence-based arguments from two credible and opposing sides, requiring them to make careful calculations about the political and policy merits of continuing or abandoning major gun control reforms.

These different subsystem environments would have been particularly important for Liberals MPs who were uncommitted on the gun control issue. The advocacy coalitions were very unlikely to sway Liberals who were already committed to the gun rights or gun control causes because, as the ACF literature shows, actors do not abandon such policy core beliefs quickly or easily. However, the advocacy coalitions could have influenced the policy positions of Liberals who were uncommitted or wavering on the gun control issue who, crucially, constituted majorities in the Liberal caucuses of both periods. In 1976-77, these uncommitted Liberals faced a policy subsystem in which the dominant gun rights coalition signalled that the pursuit of major gun controls was not worth the trouble and, ultimately, the Liberals followed this signal in abandoning Bill C-83. In contrast, the more balanced policy subsystem of 1994-95 signalled to uncommitted Liberals that there were at least some political benefits and some sound evidence-based arguments for pursuing major gun controls, and, in the end, the Liberals followed these signals. Many of these gun control coalition efforts to pressure and persuade Liberals to follow through on universal licensing and registration are described first-hand by Heidi Rathjen, one of the co-founders of the Coalition for Gun Control (Rathjen & Montpetit, 1999, pp. 150-182). Together, this comparative and anecdotal evidence suggests that the advocacy coalitions were difference-making in the Liberals' seeing through gun control policy reforms, once on the agenda.

The core beliefs data also revealed an unanticipated difference between the policy processes that might also account for the minor reforms of the 1970s and major reforms of the 1990s, and, as such, could be a confounding factor in a most-similar comparison of the two processes. The core beliefs data showed that PM Chretien was probably more committed to gun control in 1994-95 than was PM Trudeau in 1976-77. This is a potentially crucial difference in a political system with so much power concentrated in the centre of government, as it could sufficiently explain the different policy outcomes, thereby negating or obscuring the difference-making effect of the advocacy coalitions, just described. In other words, were the advocacy coalitions actually difference-making or can the different policy outcomes simply be explained as resulting from different prime ministerial beliefs about gun control?

This possibility was investigated by digging deeper into the gun control beliefs of the two prime ministers, by examining PM Trudeau's actions in the 1976-77 policy process and considering a counterfactual situation. PM Chretien's commitment to gun control, including universal licensing and registration, is well-documented in his biography (Martin, 2003, p. 172), his memoirs (Chretien, 2007, pp. 209-10), and his public statements (Winsor & Tanh Ha, 1994). Neither Trudeau's biography (English, 2006) (English, 2009) nor his memoirs (Trudeau, 1993) discuss his beliefs on gun control, but his public statements and actions indicate that he supported universal licensing, but not universal registration (Stevens, 1975). So, PM Chretien seems to have been willing to go further than PM Trudeau in adopting stringent gun controls, but this does not sufficiently explain why major gun control reforms faltered in 1976-77. Trudeau publicly supported the introduction of universal licensing in Bill C-83, and it was only after months of pressure from the gun rights coalition – the only advocacy coalition present at the time – that the Trudeau government quietly let the bill die. In short, PM Trudeau was set on pursuing a major gun control reform until faced with resistance from the gun rights coalition. He may have been more susceptible to pressure from the gun rights coalition due to his softer gun control beliefs, but it is the advocacy of the gun rights coalition and the absence of countervailing pressure from a gun control coalition,

that seems to have been difference-making in the abandonment of major reforms in 1976-77. In a counterfactual world where a gun rights coalition did not exist and the Trudeau Liberals had not faced fierce resistance to their universal licensing proposal, Bill C-83 would have very likely passed.

Conclusion

This paper has explored whether advocacy coalitions can have difference-making influence in Canadian policy processes where policy decision-making power is concentrated in the centre of government and there are often several layers of gatekeepers between the advocacy coalitions and policy-makers at the centre. Using a diachronic case study of firearms policy processes in the 1970s and 1990s, two hypotheses were investigated and, ultimately, supported. Investigation of the first hypothesis found evidence of only a gun rights coalition in the 1976-77 process, and evidence of both a gun rights coalition and a gun control coalition in the 1994-95 process. This finding was expected and is corroborated by other, less systematic analyses of the policy processes in the existing Canadian firearms policy literature. This finding also confirmed the viability of a most-similar comparison of the two policy processes to investigate the second hypothesis, which proposed that the advocacy coalitions had difference-making influence in determining the outcomes of these policy processes.

The second hypothesis was supported with respect to policy formulation and policy decision-making, but not with respect to agenda-setting. Since Liberal governments introduced major gun control reform proposals both in the absence and presence of a gun control coalition, the advocacy coalitions could not have been decisive in influencing these decisions. The difference-making effect of advocacy coalitions was clearer once major reforms had been tabled. An unopposed gun rights coalition succeeded in pressuring the Trudeau government to abandon major reforms in favour of minor reforms in 1976-77, but when the gun rights coalition was effectively counterbalanced by a strong gun control coalition in 1994-95, the Chretien government followed through on major reforms. It was also found that PM Chretien was probably a stronger believer in gun control than was PM Trudeau, but the sequence of events in the abandonment of Bill C-83, as well as a similar-world counterfactual, suggest that it was the work of advocacy coalitions, not prime ministerial beliefs, that were difference-making in the two policy processes.

Though this study supports the notion that advocacy coalitions can have difference-making policy influence in Canadian policy-making, it has limitations. Covering only a single case puts limits on the generalizability of the findings. One cannot draw conclusions, for example, about the general or mean effects of advocacy coalitions on policy outcomes in Canada, as such conclusions could only be supported by large 'n' work. It is also likely that the policy influence of advocacy coalitions varies in different contexts, so that they are difference-making in determining some policy outcomes – as they were here – and not difference-making in determining other policy outcomes. The veracity of this claim, and the contexts in which advocacy coalitions have more or less policy influence, can only be discovered through further comparative work. The cases used here are also historical and may not be fully representative of modern Canadian policy-making, so studies of advocacy coalition difference-making in more recent policy processes would be most welcome.

For now, the study's findings point to the relevance of advocacy coalitions for scholars' trying to understand Canadian policy-making. The ACF does not have a large following in Canada compared to the US, Europe, and parts of Asia. Nevertheless, there is a growing ACF literature of Canadian cases, and it is noteworthy that several Canadian studies obliquely refer to advocacy coalition-like entities in their explanations of Canadian policy-making. For example: Skogstad and Whyte (2015, p. 84) refer to "coalitions of social and political actors who face off over rival policy paradigms;" Snow (2019, p. 3) focuses on "coalitions trying to shift the social construction of naturopathic medicine;" Christensen (2020, p. 14) points to "self-undermining feedback contained in one jurisdiction [that] can shift the focus of coalitions;" and, Carter (2020, p. 16) discusses "powerful coalitions of energy industry players, elected officials, and government departments [that] collaborated to foster mutually beneficial fossil fuel development." These studies, and others, implicitly acknowledge the importance of advocacy coalitions – or close facsimiles thereof – in Canadian policy-making, but do not take advantage of the considerable reservoir of knowledge in the ACF literature by connecting with the framework. Arguably, more explicit recognition of advocacy coalitions and their influence in Canadian policy processes and more connections with the ACF in Canadian policy studies, could substantially increase our understanding of Canadian policy-making.

About the Author

Tim Heinmiller is a Professor in the Political Science department at Brock University.

ORCID

B. Timothy Heinmiller: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2790-6200>

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