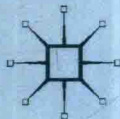


**POLICY DEBATES ON  
HYDRAULIC FRACTURING**  
COMPARING COALITION POLITICS  
IN NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE

EDITED BY

CHRISTOPHER M. WEIBLE, TANYA HEIKKILA,  
KARIN INGOLD, AND MANUEL FISCHER



Christopher M. Weible • Tanya Heikkila • Karin Ingold • Manuel Fischer  
Editors

# Policy Debates on Hydraulic Fracturing

Comparing Coalition Politics in  
North America and Europe

palgrave  
macmillan

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ISBN 978-1-137-60376-0      ISBN 978-1-137-59574-4 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59574-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016953724

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Cover design by Samantha Johnson

Printed on acid-free paper

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The registered company is Nature America Inc. New York

# Policy Debates on Hydraulic Fracturing

To  
Paul Sabatier  
for his unwavering belief that  
clarity begets clarity and mush begets mush.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors thank the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for funding, Eawag (Swiss Federal Institute for Water Science and Technology) for hosting the authors' workshop, and the International Conference of Public Policy (ICPP) and the American Political Science Association (APSA) for hosting follow-up workshops. We are also grateful to Juniper Katz and Kathleen Bailey for their assistance in editing the final manuscript, as well as to all country chapter authors for making this exciting comparative endeavor happen.

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	Flow diagram of the Advocacy Coalition Framework	6
Fig. 2.1	Percentage of respondents per position on hydraulic fracturing per state	38
Fig. 2.2	Perceived problems from least disagreement to most disagreement	39
Fig. 2.3	Percentage of coalition members reporting regular interaction with other types of actor groups	41
Fig. 3.1	Percentage of actors holding supportive or opposing beliefs	64
Fig. 3.2	Collaboration that industry and environmental groups claim to have with other actors	66
Fig. 3.3	Percentage of times actors are cited in support of shale gas development	67
Fig. 3.4	Average number of articles published per newspaper in Quebec and BC between 2010 and 2014	69
Fig. 3.5	The importance of three activities in achieving policy goals by actor	72
Fig. 5.1	Hydrocarbon resources in France	116
Fig. 6.1	Individual-level network	159
Fig. 6.2	Organizational-level network	162
Fig. 6.3	Strategy choice 2010–2014	165
Fig. 7.1	Number of FAZ statements per month	187
Fig. 7.2	Actor congruence networks	188
Fig. 8.1	Positions, preferences, and threat perception in Neuchâtel	215
Fig. 8.2	Policy positions, preferences, and threat perception in Bern	218
Fig. 8.3	Policy positions, preferences, and threat perception in Vaud	221

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Political system structure and subsystem level across the seven countries	15
Table 2.1	Mean reported levels of resource capacity by coalition per state, with totals	42
Table 2.2	Comparing mean reported levels of importance or frequency of activities between coalitions	43
Table 4.1	Average agreement within and disagreement between coalitions	91
Table 4.2	Beliefs of coalitions	92
Table 4.3	Average political information exchange	95
Table 4.4	Average technical information exchange	96
Table 5.1	Hydraulic fracturing in France: Milestones of the policy process	120
Table 5.2	ACF analysis of the French policy process of hydraulic fracturing (2008–2015)	121
Table 6.1	Organization type and political strategies	163
Table 7.1	Statements by the two actor clusters and degree of agreement (in %; absolute numbers in parathesis)	191
Table 7.2	Public support for hydraulic fracturing (in %)	194
Table 8.1	Cases, policy output, and degree of change	211
Table 8.2	Coalitions in Neuchâtel	214
Table 8.3	Within—and across—coalition densities, Neuchâtel	216
Table 8.4	Coalitions in Bern	217
Table 8.5	Within—and across—coalition densities, Bern	219
Table 8.6	Coalitions in Vaud	220
Table 8.7	Within—and across—coalition densities, Vaud	222
Table 9.1	Policy and hydraulic fracturing status as of 2015	255
Table 9.2	Methods of data collection and analysis	259

# CONTENTS

<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Christopher M. Weible, Tanya Heikkila, Karin Ingold, and Manuel Fischer	
<b>2 Contours of Coalition Politics on Hydraulic Fracturing Within the United States of America</b>	<b>29</b>
Tanya Heikkila and Christopher M. Weible	
<b>3 Advocacy Coalitions, the Media, and Hydraulic Fracturing in the Canadian Provinces of British Columbia and Quebec</b>	<b>53</b>
Éric Montpetit, Erick Lachapelle, and Alexandre Harvey	
<b>4 Hydraulic Fracturing Policy in the United Kingdom: Coalition, Cooperation, and Opposition in the Face of Uncertainty</b>	<b>81</b>
Paul Cairney, Manuel Fischer, and Karin Ingold	
<b>5 The French Ban on Hydraulic Fracturing and the Attempts to Reverse It: Social Mobilization, Professional Forums, and Coalition Strategies</b>	<b>115</b>
Sébastien Chailleux and Stéphane Moyson	

<b>6</b>	<b>Advocacy Coalition Politics and Strategies on Hydraulic Fracturing in Sweden</b>	147
	Daniel Nohrstedt and Kristin Olofsson	
<b>7</b>	<b>The Politics of Hydraulic Fracturing in Germany: Party Competition at Different Levels of Government</b>	177
	Jale Tosun and Achim Lang	
<b>8</b>	<b>Belief Conflicts and Coalition Structures Driving Subnational Policy Responses: The Case of Swiss Regulation of Unconventional Gas Development</b>	201
	Karin Ingold and Manuel Fischer	
<b>9</b>	<b>Assessments and Aspirations</b>	239
	Karin Ingold, Manuel Fischer, Tanya Heikkila, and Christopher M. Weible	
	<b>Index</b>	265

## Introduction

*Christopher M. Weible, Tanya Heikkila, Karin Ingold,  
and Manuel Fischer*

A central feature of any political system is how people interact with their government. In democratic governments and in contentious situations, these interactions include coalition politics. Coalition politics exists when people and organizations from inside and outside of government mobilize and coordinate with others who share their beliefs about what government should or should not do on an issue. In forming coalitions, individuals and organizations may interact with each other either formally, such as joining an association, or informally, perhaps by cooperating to achieve shared goals. These interactions can be as simple as sharing information or as complicated as developing and executing a common strategy for influencing government. The interactions may result in changes to, or the continuation of, public policy that affects short- and long-term outcomes in a society. This book offers a

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C.M. Weible et al. (eds.), *Policy Debates on Hydraulic Fracturing*,

DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59574-4\_1

comparison of coalition politics and public policies across seven countries on hydraulic fracturing debates: one of the most salient and contentious issues of the twenty-first century in environmental and energy politics. The comparison relies on a shared theoretical framework, the advocacy coalition framework (ACF), and a set of various but complementary empirical methods.

Hydraulic fracturing is a technique applied in unconventional oil and gas exploitation. Debates around hydraulic fracturing are often highly conflictive with polarized perspectives. Some people fear the potential harms to public and environmental health associated with hydraulic fracturing and advocate policies stopping or restricting the technique. Other people believe the technique provides substantial economic benefits and, thus, favor more liberal policy arrangements for its expansion. These differences in perceptions of the risks and benefits and, as a consequence, in policy preferences, create a threatening condition for both sides of the issue. The result is the mobilization of people into coalitions rooted in differences in perceptions of the risks and benefits of unconventional oil and gas development that uses hydraulic fracturing, and in their divergent positions on the role of government in governing the risks and benefits.

The salience and intensity of the debates over hydraulic fracturing are amplified because the issue intersects with many other issues in a society. The development of unconventional oil and natural gas resources involves questions over issues of national energy independence and the appropriate jurisdictional authority for its regulation in multilevel governments. It intersects with broader issues of renewable and nonrenewable energy development, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, land use, air quality regulations, and management of water supply and quality. Unconventional oil and gas development provides jobs and tax revenues to communities but also subjects some communities to boom-and-bust economic cycles. It often pits surface property owners against subsurface mineral owners within a broader context of natural resource management. All of these intersections occur under scientific and technical uncertainty and concern both potential risks and benefits of hydraulic fracturing. Consequently, hydraulic fracturing debates attract the attention of the news media, mass public, and government officials.

The coalition politics and public policies on the issue of hydraulic fracturing vary within and across countries. In some countries, the policy debates and processes are primarily centralized at the national level of government. In others, they are more decentralized at subunit levels of government. In some countries, the debates focus primarily on oil and gas development that uses hydraulic fracturing, whereas the debates in others

focus on hydraulic fracturing as part of a broader energy development strategy. This book compares the diversity of coalition politics and public policy of the hydraulic fracturing issue across seven countries in North America and Europe, highlighting differences in terms of coalition structures, policy processes, and policy outputs across these countries.

Such a comparative analysis fits within an academic field of study on comparative public policy, which is the descriptive and explanatory study of one or more public policies across issues, contexts, or time (Hecló 1972; Feldman 1978; Heidenheimer et al. 1990; Gupta 2012).<sup>1</sup> Public policies can be defined as the actions and inactions of a government or an equivalent authority, which can come in many forms, including laws, regulations, statutes, and government programs. Public policies are at the epicenter of a process that unfolds over time by which citizens and governments politically interact to shape how societies address, or fail to address, issues.<sup>2</sup> Such policy processes occur in a context that exhibits a variety of attributes including forms of government, socioeconomic, physical and biological conditions, culture, and history. Policy processes are also shaped by events such as elections, economic recessions, technological innovations, and natural disasters. The comparative study of public policy can involve exploring different public policies in the same context, different public policies in relation to the same issue, changes to a public policy in the same locale over time, and a range of public policy responses to similar types of crises, among other approaches.

Comparative public policy has been a part of the study of public policy since it began as an academic field in the middle of the twentieth century (McDougal 1952; Lasswell 1956). As in comparative politics in general, the rationale for comparative public policy is that knowledge is best gained about the political interactions between people and their government by controlling for, and also varying, some aspects of public policies, contexts, events, and issues. For example, lessons can be learned about the effects of the structure of government on public policies and the related political behavior when the same issue is studied at the same time across different forms of government.

The challenges of conducting comparative public policy studies are well documented (Hecló 1972; Feldman 1978; Gupta 2012). They can be simplified into finding the right balance between two divergent considerations. One consideration is the need to provide a shared approach across cases that establishes a common language, assumptions, and guidance in conducting the research to make insightful comparisons. This involves guiding researchers to focus on certain elements of a research puzzle and certain relationships among the key elements, while ignoring others. If



researchers are studying different components of the research puzzle in their respective case studies, then no comparison is possible. The second consideration is the need to offer flexibility to researchers to identify, describe, and explain the relevant elements of a specific case to make valid and reliable claims. If the shared approach is too rigid, then there might be strength in the comparison but weakness in each individual case study, which misses crucial case specificities. The research strategy adopted for this book, and described in the following sections, is to strike a balance between both considerations, thereby providing enough guidance for researchers to generate insightful comparisons across the cases, while also allowing enough flexibility for valid and reliable research in a single case.

### ADVOCACY COALITION FRAMEWORK

As any other policy issue, hydraulic fracturing politics is too complex to study in a single location, let alone comparatively across seven countries, without a systematic approach for guiding the research. The approach used to guide the research in this volume is the advocacy coalition framework (ACF). The ACF was created by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith in the 1980s (Sabatier 1988; Jenkins-Smith 1982; Heintz and Jenkins-Smith 1988; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). The strength of the ACF lies in its capacity to help researchers understand and explain advocacy coalitions, learning, and policy change within a contentious policy issue. This strength comes from the ACF's transparency in laying out simplifying assumptions, its clarity in identifying and defining concepts for study, and its explicit theoretical depictions of how concepts interrelate (Cairney and Heikkila 2014). Given the potential for intense conflicts in hydraulic fracturing politics and policymaking, and the likelihood for policy change in many countries, the ACF is an ideal approach for guiding this research.

There have been more than 200 applications of the ACF (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014). Some of these applications have been on energy-related issues, including offshore oil and gas issues in the USA (Jenkins-Smith et al. 1991), nuclear energy policy in Sweden (Nohrstedt 2008) and in the USA (Ripberger et al. 2011), and energy and climate issues in the USA (Elgin and Weible 2013) and in Switzerland (Ingold 2011; Ingold and Varone 2012). Past research highlights some of the insights that can be gained from applying the ACF. For example, research on energy-related issues has confirmed that coalitions are relatively stable in their membership over long periods of time; contentious policy issues usually involve