



## Review

# Analysis of the Relevance of the Advocacy Coalition Framework to Analyze Public Policies in Non-Pluralist Countries

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**Abstract:** The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) is a theoretical approach developed for the study of the emergence of public policies in pluralist countries. Little is known about the relevance of the framework for the study of policies in non-pluralist countries (NPCs). A review of the literature was conducted on the use of ACF in studies performed in NPCs. Nineteen documents were identified. They were based on studies conducted in China, Laos, and Vietnam. The results show that the ACF is a powerful theoretical approach for highlighting the dynamics of interactions between coalitions that exist in NPCs, as in pluralist countries, and for highlighting their specificity. ACF is a relevant tool for the study of the determinants of the emergence of public policies in NPCs.

**Keywords:** advocacy coalition framework; non-pluralist countries; policy process; public policy; policy advocacy



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Public policy can be defined as “a program of action (or inaction) of a government to achieve specific goals” (Clavier and de Leeuw 2013). Public policies are a key determinant of the health of the population through the major changes they induce in society that affect a wide range of more direct health determinants. They are considered a major tool not only to improve the health of the population but also to promote more equity in health in a healthcare jurisdiction (Embrett and Randall 2014).

Public policies introduce major social and economic changes in society. As a result, some groups might win something, while others might lose something. In a pluralist country, allowing each stakeholder to express the benefits or disadvantages expected from an answer to a social need through a conceivable new public policy. It does not only contribute to identifying needs that require to be addressed. It also aims at identifying where, in a policy, compromises can be made in order to reduce confrontations in society (Lemieux 2002).

The emergence of a policy in the health sector, as in any other sector, is a crucial stage in the political process. It is where policy options are explored, evaluated, and then accepted, adapted, or rejected by decision makers. This step involves many and diverse actors who are directly or indirectly concerned by the coming change, who interact, often under intense and targeted political pressure from special advisers, lobbyists, and interest groups (Lemieux 2002).

To succeed in influencing the emergence of a public policy that responds to their own interests, the actors tend to create coalitions. These coalitions bring together actors who work together to increase the chances that their concerns will be considered in the policy. Creating a coalition is therefore a strategy deployed by actors to increase their ability to act and, for many of them, especially Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to survive in a

given country (Breton et al. 2013). Using the concept of coalition as a lens to explore the emergence of a policy contributes to an understanding of why it may have emerged, and why it has particular characteristics.

Different conceptual frameworks have been proposed to understand how some actors are more successful than others in embedding their concerns in emerging public policies. One of the most commonly used frameworks is the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier and Weible 2007). This framework was originally developed to understand the policy-making process in the specific setting of the United States.

Over the years, ACF has also been applied to the study of policies in other countries, so far, mostly Western pluralist countries. Yet, the applicability of this conceptual framework for the study of public policies outside the Western world has been confirmed by several studies (Henry et al. 2014; Nwalie 2019; Park and Weible 2018). Yet, no article has discussed the relevance of the framework for the study of the emergence of public policies in non-pluralist countries (NPCs).

In this article, we aim to explore a topic that has yet to be explored: the relevance of a theory commonly used in public policy research conducted in pluralist countries, to non-pluralist countries. We defined non-pluralist countries as the country governed by a single-party system means “one in which only one political party is legally allowed to hold power” (Clark et al. 2013). We pose the following question: How informative can this theoretical approach be when applied to the study of the emergence of public policies in non-pluralist countries? Having a tool that is known to be relevant to non-pluralistic countries would allow policymakers to better conceptualize the foundations of the public policies they plan to implement.

This article is structured as follows: The next two subsections introduce the ACF, and whether the ACF is a relevant approach for non-pluralist countries. Section 2 describes the materials and methods used. Section 3 presents the results and Section 4 discusses our main findings, the conclusion, and suggestions for future research.

### *1.2. Advocacy Coalition Framework Overview*

ACF assumes that public policies are the result of competition between different coalitions of actors, who engage in lobbying activities in order to promote their own interests. Coalitions bring together actors or organizations who share similar policy beliefs on a particular policy issue and get into competition with coalitions that promote another point of view. The competition dynamic between coalitions is analyzed taking into account the influence of external elements on the policy-making process (Sabatier and Weible 2007).

ACF has been used to study a variety of topics in different contexts, particularly in North America and Western Europe. However, questions emerged about the capacity of ACF to understand the specificity of the policy-making process in political systems that differ from what is found in the Western world (Henry et al. 2014). The main concern is the fact that the framework is based on assumptions that coalitions exploit the characteristics of pluralistic political systems, notably the possibility that power may shift to a party other than the one in power. This may not be possible elsewhere, notably in non-pluralist countries. ACF is based on key features of pluralism, including factionalized, competitive, and adversarial groups in competition to influence politicians who are also in competition to be elected. The latter have to convince voters of the merits of their political decisions (Cairney 2012). This situation does not apply to non-pluralist countries.

### *1.3. Is Advocacy Coalition Framework a Relevant Approach for Non-Pluralist Countries?*

However, ACF could be relevant to the study of the emergence of public policies in pluralist countries, even if these policies emerge through different channels than those usually followed in pluralist countries. One reason is that ACF sees policy emergence as a dynamic of interactions between coalitions. Yet, NPCs are not without coalitions, although these have characteristics that distinguish them from coalitions in pluralist countries. Indeed, in most NPCs, there are ways for ordinary citizens, civil society organizations, or

other community-based groups to voice their concerns and needs in terms of public policy. External actors, such as the United Nations through its agencies (such as the WHO or the UNICEF), bi- and multi-lateral cooperations, and NGOs, might be willing to act to convince the government to develop a public policy. To be better heard, these actors, when they share a vision on a given issue, often try to join together. In NPCs, there are the foundations for the emergence of coalitions that may differ from those found in pluralist countries but which exist for the same purpose. An ACF-based methodological approach, because it focuses on how coalitions lead to policy, could be relevant to the study of public policies emerging in NPCs.

## 2. Materials and Methods

We conducted a literature review of published scientific studies that included reviews, research articles, dissertations, and theses. Only studies written in English were included.

### 2.1. Literature Search

A librarian was consulted to identify sources of information. We conducted a literature search on the Web of Science. This database was chosen because it is multidisciplinary and covers comprehensively our field of interest, that is, public policies in health. We also searched for additional articles on relevant websites, and reference lists of all relevant publications were also explored. There was no limit on the date of publication. The following keywords were used to conduct a literature search: “policy”, “public policy”, “policy change”, “emergence of policy”, “policy making”, “policy development”, “policy influence”, “policy process”, “policy advocacy”, “advocacy coalition framework”, “ACF”, “advocacy coalition”, “non-pluralist country”, “single party”, “one party”, “communis\*”, “authoritarian regime”, “China”, “Laos”, “Vietnam”, “Eritrea”, “Cuba”, “North Korea”, “Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic” (See Appendix A for complete search strategy).

### 2.2. Study Selection and Screening Process

The study selection was carried out independently by two researchers. To be included in our review, a study had to: (1) be reviews, research articles, dissertations, and theses; (2) be about the emergence of the public policy or policy change; (3) be based on ACF to examine the emergence of public policies; (4) be performed in a non-pluralist country. Documents were excluded if they were about: (1) policy analysis without applying the ACF; (2) policy analysis in pluralist countries (e.g., in post NPCs); (3) books, book chapters and commentary.

### 2.3. Data Extraction and Synthesis

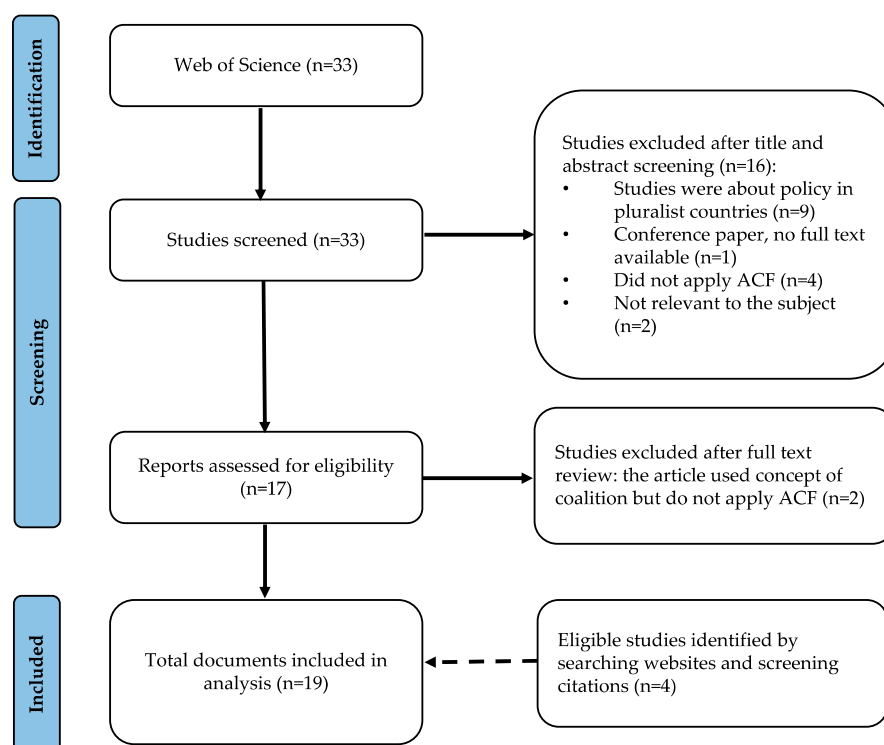
Data extraction was based on the ACF dimensions: advocacy coalition, activities deployed to strengthen the capacity of a coalition to influence a public policy, activities deployed to influence a policy, and external events that influence the dynamic of the policy-making process. The data extraction was performed independently by two researchers. Conflicts were resolved by a third senior reviewer.

The interpretation of findings and knowledge synthesis were performed by consensus by two researchers.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Search Results

Thirty-three articles were identified in the search of the Web of Science database. A review of the abstracts led to the elimination of 16 articles. A full-text review led to the exclusion of two additional articles. This review is therefore based on 15 articles. Four additional articles were identified via manual searching on relevant websites and from the lists of references in the identified studies (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** PRISMA flow diagram of study selection.

Seventeen studies took place in China, one in Laos, and one in Vietnam. The objective of the studies was diverse. It concerned the fields of environment, education, social program, public health, and urban development.

### 3.2. Results on Dynamic Advocacy Coalition and External Events in Triggering the Emergence of Public Policy in Non-Pluralist Countries

The presence of coalitions in NPCs suggests similarities in the dynamics of public policy emergence between NPCs and pluralist countries. Yet, differences exist. The main differences revealed by the articles occur in the composition and dynamics of the coalitions.

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the main observations brought using ACF in NPCs. The tables are described through four components: (1) the coalitions, (2) the activities deployed to strengthen the capacity of a coalition to influence a public policy, (3) the activities deployed to influence a policy, and (4) external events that influence the dynamic of the policy-making process.

**Table 1.** Advocacy coalitions/policy brokers and activities deployed to strengthen the capacity of the coalition to influence a public policy.

Advocacy Coalitions/Policy Brokers		Activities Deployed to Strengthen the Capacity of the Coalition to Influence a Public Policy
Number of Coalitions Identified and Characteristic of the Coalition	Coalition Members	Assets Building
One coalition ( <a href="#">Sengchaleun et al. 2021</a> ; <a href="#">Stensdal 2014</a> ; <a href="#">Zhan and Tang 2013</a> ) • Non-government ( <a href="#">Sengchaleun et al. 2021</a> ; <a href="#">Stensdal 2014</a> ; <a href="#">Zhan and Tang 2013</a> )	• NGOs, scholars, scientists, and media ( <a href="#">Stensdal 2014</a> )	• Investment in knowledge acquisition and dissemination ( <a href="#">Aamodt and Stensdal 2017</a> ; <a href="#">Stensdal 2014</a> ; <a href="#">Wong 2016a, 2016b, 2019</a> ) • Leadership ( <a href="#">Han et al. 2014</a> ) • Sharing information with other (opposing) coalitions ( <a href="#">Francesch-Huidobro and Mai 2012</a> ) • Building networks with the government and the party-state system ( <a href="#">Han et al. 2014</a> ) • Developing the proposition in accordance with the National Development Plan ( <a href="#">Xu and Pittock 2020</a> ; <a href="#">Zhou et al. 2021</a> )
	• Scientists, media, and domestic and international NGOs ( <a href="#">Zhan and Tang 2013</a> )	
	• United Nations agencies ( <a href="#">Sengchaleun et al. 2021</a> )	
Two coalitions ( <a href="#">Han et al. 2014</a> ; <a href="#">Lee 2016</a> ; <a href="#">Teets 2018</a> ; <a href="#">Wong 2016a, 2016b, 2019</a> ; <a href="#">Xu and Pittock 2020</a> ; <a href="#">Zhou et al. 2021</a> ) • Mixed coalitions: included government and non-government ( <a href="#">Han et al. 2014</a> ; <a href="#">Lee 2016</a> ; <a href="#">Teets 2018</a> ; <a href="#">Wong 2016a, 2016b, 2019</a> ; <a href="#">Xu and Pittock 2020</a> ) • Mixed coalitions: included government and non-government and identified policy brokers ( <a href="#">Zhou et al. 2021</a> )	• Civil society organizations, NGOs (domestic and international), researchers, subnational government	
	• Civil society organizations, media, and government allies ( <a href="#">Teets 2018</a> )	
	• Business actors, local government, national commission, scholars	
	• National institutes, NGOs, media, and scholars ( <a href="#">Han et al. 2014</a> )	
	• Municipal government, developers (dominant) *	
	• Expert-Experts, academics, non-registered organizations, mass media, netizens (minority) * ( <a href="#">Lee 2016</a> )	
	• Municipal government, scientists	
	• Journalists, residents, and experts ( <a href="#">Wong 2016a, 2016b, 2019</a> )	
	• Ministries, think tanks (experts, policy researchers)	
	• Ministries, business actors	
	• Policy brokers: government agencies ( <a href="#">Zhou et al. 2021</a> )	
	• Ministries, local government, business actors	
Three coalitions ( <a href="#">Francesch-Huidobro and Mai 2012</a> ; <a href="#">Guo et al. 2016</a> ; <a href="#">Hu 2019</a> ; <a href="#">Li and Wong 2020</a> ) • Non-government ( <a href="#">Francesch-Huidobro and Mai 2012</a> ; <a href="#">Hu 2019</a> ) • Mixed coalitions: included government and non-government ( <a href="#">Guo et al. 2016</a> ; <a href="#">Li and Wong 2020</a> )	• Ministries, academia, NGOs, and residents ( <a href="#">Xu and Pittock 2020</a> )	
	• Association A	
	• Association B	
	• Association C ( <a href="#">Francesch-Huidobro and Mai 2012</a> )	
	• Sport officials	
	• Athletes	
	• Former athletes ( <a href="#">Hu 2019</a> )	
	• Government officials, scholars (dominant) *	
	• Expert-led coalitions (minority) *	
	• Expert-led coalitions (minority) * ( <a href="#">Li and Wong 2020</a> )	
	• Employees	
	• Employers	
	• Government ( <a href="#">Guo et al. 2016</a> )	

\* Mentioned in the articles.

**Table 2.** Activities deployed by coalitions and external events that influence emergence and policy change.

Activities Deployed by Coalitions	External Events
<b>Advocacy activities aiming at the government:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By using scientific and technical information (Han et al. 2014; Lee 2016; Li and Wong 2020; Wong 2016a, 2016b; Zhan and Tang 2013)</li> <li>By informing ministries' executives through events (seminars, conferences) (Sengchaleun et al. 2021; Wong 2016a)</li> </ul> <b>Incentives:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing technical and funding support to the government in policy making (Francesch-Huidobro and Mai 2012; Kwon and Hanlon 2016; Sengchaleun et al. 2021; Zhou et al. 2021)</li> <li>Offering opportunities to get acquainted with foreign experience (Sengchaleun et al. 2021)</li> <li>Building interpersonal networking (Francesch-Huidobro and Mai 2012; Han et al. 2014; Li and Wong 2020; Sengchaleun et al. 2021; Teets 2018)</li> </ul> <b>Strategies deployed to gain public support for advocacy activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using news, media and online discussion forum (Kwon and Hanlon 2016; Lee 2016; Li and Weible 2021; Wong 2016a, 2019; Zhan and Tang 2013)</li> <li>Launching a campaign (Wong 2016a, 2016b)</li> </ul> <b>Forming networks with international actors' allies (Han et al. 2014; Li and Weible 2021)</b> <b>Other activities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mobilizing the population (Wong 2016a, 2016b)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to adapt existing public policies following the emergence of another policy (Li and Weible 2021; Stensdal 2014; Zhou et al. 2021)</li> <li>Changes in socio-economic environment (Aamodt and Stensdal 2017; Clavier and de Leeuw 2013; Van Dang 2013; Kwon and Hanlon 2016; Li and Weible 2021; Stensdal 2014; Wong 2019; Zhou et al. 2021)</li> <li>Advocacy for change through the use of new technologies by ordinary citizens (Aamodt and Stensdal 2017; Li and Weible 2021; Wong 2019)</li> <li>Natural disasters (Li and Weible 2021)</li> <li>Personal experience by decision-makers with public policies abroad (Li and Weible 2021)</li> <li>International agreement (Sengchaleun et al. 2021; Xu and Pittock 2020)</li> </ul>

### 3.2.1. Coalitions

Three studies documented a single coalition, eight studies documented two coalitions, and four studies documented three coalitions. Some coalitions, hereby named “mixed-coalitions”, consisted of government bodies and other stakeholders, while others, hereby named “non-government coalitions,” consisted of non-government organizations. The non-government coalitions bring together experts, journalists, civil society organizations, and/or residents (individuals who are the primary agents concerned by the policies), NGOs and/or international organizations (e.g., United Nations agencies) (Francesch-Huidobro and Mai 2012; Hu 2019; Sengchaleun et al. 2021; Stensdal 2014; Zhan and Tang 2013). The mixed coalitions are composed of government (e.g., ministries, local government) and non-government actors (e.g., civil society organizations, business actors, academia, and/or NGOs) (Guo et al. 2016; Han et al. 2014; Lee 2016; Li and Wong 2020; Teets 2018; Wong 2016a, 2016b; Xu and Pittock 2020; Zhou et al. 2021). One study allowed identifying the existence of policy brokers. The brokers were public servants of local governments and people appointed by the central government. They had the mandate to help two coalitions with opposed solutions for a public policy find a consensus between them (Zhou et al. 2021) (Table 1).

Some mixed coalitions were named “dominant” because they detain and control a significant amount of resources and because their members include the policy-maker themselves (municipal government or government officials). The non-government coalition is then named “minority coalition”, and consists mainly of expert-led coalitions (Lee 2016; Li and Wong 2020). These expert-led coalitions have a special purpose. They exist because



of the government's desire to have access to missing expertise to refine its interpretation of a social problem (Li and Weible 2021).

The use of ACF allowed showing that coalitions in NPCs that present themselves as the voice of communities are often dominated not by representatives of the community, but by elites, i.e., people who are perceived as having experience and power, and who are leading the coalition even if the issues addressed by the policy has little impact on their own interest. Elites might therefore not use their influence to promote their own interests as other members of the coalition, but might impose their own understanding of the issue under consideration (Kwon and Hanlon 2016; Li and Weible 2021). This power tends to be used in particular when the main beneficiaries of the policy are considered by the elite as having a low level of education and little capacity to influence the party in power (Li and Weible 2021).

Furthermore, studies based on ACF enabled the description of a counterintuitive phenomenon. In NPCs, coalitions can be ground-based. These coalitions emerge from a community's willingness to engage in a bottom-up dynamic in order to bring to the table decision-maker concerns deemed by the community to require public policy (Kwon and Hanlon 2016; Li and Weible 2021). The use of ACF allowed describing a specific democratic process that exists in many NPCs to allow citizens to influence politicians. Coalitions that give a direct voice to the population regarding the emergence or change in a public policy are not impossible in NPCs.

### 3.2.2. Activities to Strengthen the Influence of Coalitions

ACF showed that in NPCs, there is an imbalance of power between existing coalitions, that lies not so much on the human and financial resources, but on the political power inside the coalitions. Compared to government coalitions, non-government coalitions tend to be weaker, especially when members of the coalition are societal actors (Han et al. 2014). Coalitions might, therefore, need to strengthen their influence capacity. The ACF shows that the main strategy deployed to strengthen the capacity to influence is to develop its own scientific-based expertise and demonstrate its relevance, notably through investments in scientific knowledge acquisition. Detaining acknowledged scientific expertise that is rare elsewhere is seen as a major asset to influence the government in NPCs to consider the emergence of a new public policy (Aamodt and Stensdal 2017; Stensdal 2014; Wong 2016a, 2016b, 2019) (See Table 1).

### 3.2.3. Activities to Influence the Policy-Making Process

ACF shows that the systematic approach to scientifically document a social problem, and propose evidence-based solutions framed in the legal context becomes then the main strategy deployed by non-government coalitions to incite policy-makers to consider developing a new public policy (Francesch-Huidobro and Mai 2012; Han et al. 2014; Li and Weible 2021; Zhan and Tang 2013). One notes that among the information collected by non-government coalitions are grievances expressed by ordinary citizens who use web-based social platforms to attract public attention (Wong 2016a, 2016b, 2019). ACF shows that these web-based platforms might transform profoundly the old way coalitions were built and how they maneuver to influence decision-makers in NPCs, in systems where political conservatism can bring huge constraints to new influence avenues (Table 2).

### 3.2.4. External Events Influence Policy Process in Non-Pluralist Countries

The use of ACF in non-pluralist countries also allowed highlighting the fact that external events can be significant factors to trigger a policy-making process (Table 2).

External events referred mainly to the considerable social changes that have occurred in all three countries over the last decades (Van Dang 2013; Li and Weible 2021; Sengchaleun et al. 2021). Populations in most NPCs have been suddenly exposed to an abundance of information about the existence of a diverse understanding of social problems and possible solutions, which the means of information control existing in NPCs fail to limit. New

possibilities for answering community needs emerged and were quickly disseminated. ACF was able to show how this influence of new ideas, visions, and possibilities for action was a key factor in getting NPC governments to implement new public policies ([Aamodt and Stensdal 2017](#); [Li and Weible 2021](#); [Xu and Pittock 2020](#); [Zhou et al. 2021](#)).

ACF also allowed showing how the international political situation could impact the development of public policies in NPCs. For example, it allowed putting in light the influence of international obligations resulting from a widespread commitment by governments to meet the Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals as a key factor associated with the emergence of a new public policy ([Sengchaleun et al. 2021](#)).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

This review was conducted to study how ACF can contribute to the understanding of the process of making a public policy emerge or change in NPCs. Two main observations came out of the review. The first observation is that NPCs, despite being led by a single political party, have public policy dynamics that are based, as in pluralist countries, on interactions between coalitions. The second observation is that coalitions in NPCs have specificities.

Indeed, this review shows that an advocacy coalition's dynamic exists in NPCs and that it is instrumental, as in pluralist countries, to the emergence or changes of public policies. The literature review identifies three main explanations to explain the existence of a coalition dynamic in countries where the single party leading the state takes the formal responsibility of identifying the needs of the population and the solutions to be provided to these problems.

The first explanation is related to the fact that government bodies alone might not have the expertise required to build a public policy. The government can solicit external actors if these actors detain the missing expertise and can incite them to build a coalition. Such a coalition provides a means for the government to engage in a Socratic dialogue with experts and thus acquire information that helps it shape new public policy ([Devarajan and Khemani 2016](#)). Indeed, regular interactions and exchanges between the government and external actors can influence policy emergence and policy changes ([Pelletier et al. 2013](#)).

The second explanation is related to the fact that many external actors in NPCs, in particular the United Nations agencies, have the legitimacy to suggest that the government takes an interest in a public issue that can be addressed by a new public policy. As for the role of the United Nations agencies, their current involvement in coalition-building stems primarily from their mandate to use their complementarity to support governments in their efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ([United Nations 2016](#)).

The third explanation is related to how much new technology has changed the world. New information technologies and social networks have created new dynamics that give a voice to groups of the population who, in the past, would not have been able to influence decision makers' consideration of a problem whose solution seemed to require a public policy. Social media can be an effective trigger for coalition building, even in some countries where censorship limits their use ([Yang and Calhoun 2007](#)).

The second observation is that coalitions in NPCs tend to have their own characteristics. First, the articles found show that one of the main drives for the emergence of new public policies in NPCs is the influence of coalitions led by external actors, notably United Nations agencies and NGOs. This influence stems in great part from the importance of the MDGs and SDGs in the world today. A large part of the United Nations agencies' mandates and agendas focus on supporting governments to achieve these goals. United Nations agencies are also encouraged to exploit their complementarities in order to maximize their contribution to achieving the goals. As for the NGOs, they have an obvious interest in joining such coalitions because these coalitions have the capacity to influence the allocation of external resources ([Saner and Yiu 2014](#)).



Second, the articles examined in this review suggest that coalitions tend to base their legitimacy on evidence-based interpretations of problems and proposed solutions to those problems. They also make sure that their propositions are culturally and legally acceptable. Both evidence and political acceptability of a problem and its solution are the pillars of the strategies deployed by coalitions, particularly when the problem concerns issues considered neglected by the population (Wong 2016b). These strategies are probably much more fundamental in the NPCs than in the pluralist countries, given the party's control over circulating information.

Third, confrontations, negotiations, or policy debates between advocacy coalitions are fundamental mechanisms underlying the emergence of policies in pluralist countries (Li and Weible 2021). In NPCs, this review suggests that non-governmental coalitions often adopt "muted strategies", such as discussing informally with the government in advance their intention to take a public position on an issue that could lead to public policy, referring to laws and official discourses to legitimize their stance, and refraining from objecting to the government's decision-making authority. The formal advocacy argument made by the coalitions avoids the appearance of not following the official line defined by the government (Cai 2008).

The final characteristic of coalitions is the attempt to have personal connections between key members of the coalitions and policymakers. These relationships can be a determinant of the level of influence a coalition can have on the emergence of new public policy (Zhu 2009).

This review of the literature has some limitations. The first limit is related to the fact that conclusions on the specificities of ACF applied in non-pluralistic countries lie in the documents retrieved. Publisher articles reflect the interests of researchers, hence on the topics they work on and the places of study where their research can take place. Many other topics exist that could benefit from an analysis based on ACF. These topics, if undertaken, could lead to different conclusions. Moreover, only articles written in English could be examined. Some other studies based on ACF were found. However, they were written in Chinese. We cannot exclude the fact that these excluded articles would have provided additional and different information that supports the interest in using ACF for the study of public policies in NPCs.

Moreover, one notes that all the studies included in this review were conducted in communist countries. The countries under study all have communist regimes. They have, by definition, concerns for the most marginalized populations, and therefore for the adaptation of public policies to community needs. These needs need therefore to be identified. There is an ideological interest in being able to respond to them effectively. The ground is set for a coalition game as a tool to identify problems and solutions that a socialist government should address. If the conclusions drawn from the studies examined here apply to other political systems, particularly quasi-NPCs, is something that should be explored.

In conclusion, this literature review focuses on a little-explored topic: How is a theoretical approach commonly used to study the emergence of public policy in pluralist countries, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), relevant to the study of the emergence of public policy in non-pluralist countries (NPCs)? This review includes articles on studies conducted in the fields of environment, education, social program, public health, and urban development. It shows that a methodological approach commonly used in pluralist countries is adequate to answer research questions related to the emergence of public policies in NPCs. ACF is a useful tool to interpret how interactions between actors through coalitions influence the development of national public policies. Yet, ACF is only one among several approaches that can be used to study public policy. Each of them brings proper information that may be of interest to those who have to write and implement public policies. It remains to be explored whether these approaches, like ACF, are relevant for answering research questions on the emergence of public policies. It also remains to be explored whether these approaches can identify patterns specific to non-pluralistic

countries. For those concerned with addressing the unmet needs of populations in non-pluralistic countries, such information could be of great value.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Search Strategy for Web of SCIENCE (17 December 2021).

Concepts	Research Strategy Keywords	Research	Results
Free vocabulary	TS = ("Public policy" OR Policy OR "Policy change" OR "Emergence of policy" OR "Policy Making" OR "Policy process" OR "Policy development" OR Policy influence OR Policy advocacy)	#1	911,625
Free vocabulary	TS = ("Advocacy coalition framework" OR ACF OR "Advocacy coalition")	#2	7299
Free vocabulary	TS = ("Non-pluralist country" OR "Single party" OR "One party" OR "Authoritarian regime" OR Communis * OR China OR Laos OR Lao PDR OR Vietnam OR Cuba OR North Korea OR Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic OR Sahrawi)	#3	1,188,741
	#1 AND #2 AND #3		33

\* Gives results that include "Communist" and "Communism" etc.

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