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Dynamics of Actors and Stakeholders in the Formation of Public Policy Arguments: A Review through the Narrative Policy Framework and the Advocacy Coalition Framework

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Abstract

Abstract: The formulation of public policy is a dynamic process shaped by interactions among policy actors and stakeholders who possess different interests, resources, and levels of influence. However, previous studies have largely examined policy actors, stakeholder participation, policy narratives, and advocacy coalitions separately, leaving limited understanding of how these dimensions interact in shaping policy arguments. This study aims to analyze the influence of actors and stakeholders on the formation of public policy arguments through an integrative review using the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) and the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). The research employed a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review. Data were collected from 35 scientific journal articles and 8 academic books published between 2020 and 2026, obtained from Google Scholar, Scopus, SINTA, and GARUDA. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis by identifying patterns related to policy actors, stakeholder roles, policy narratives, and advocacy coalitions. The findings reveal that formal actors, including government institutions and bureaucracies, dominate policy argumentation through institutional authority, while informal actors such as academics, media, civil society organizations, and interest groups contribute by producing evidence, shaping public opinion, and conducting advocacy. The Narrative Policy Framework demonstrates that policy actors strategically construct narratives through settings, characters, plots, and moral messages to legitimize policy preferences and mobilize public support. Meanwhile, the Advocacy Coalition Framework explains that actors sharing similar policy core beliefs establish advocacy coalitions to strengthen collective arguments and influence policy outcomes. The study concludes that public policy arguments emerge from the interaction of actor power, stakeholder interests, narrative construction, and advocacy coalition dynamics. Integrating NPF and ACF provides a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding policy argumentation and offers valuable insights for developing more inclusive and evidence-based policymaking.

Introduction

Public policy is the government's main instrument to address various social problems faced by the community. However, the public policy formation process is not purely neutral and technocratic, but involves complex interactions between various actors and stakeholders who have different interests, resources, influences, and arguments (Ilhami, 2023; Kaplima, 2020). Each participant in the policymaking process aims to create arguments that can influence public choices for their own goals and areas of interest. Therefore, a deep understanding of how actors and stakeholders shape public policy arguments becomes crucial to explaining how a policy is developed, debated, and ultimately implemented.

In contemporary public policy studies, policy actors include both government and non-governmental entities. Individuals, groups, or organizations that have interests and capacity to influence the making and implementation of public policies are known as policy actors (Rahardian, 2024). The involvement of diverse actors shows how various interests interact and compete in the policy arena to produce public policy. Each actor provides a unique point of view, ideals, and goals, which results in lively debates throughout the policy-making process. Stakeholder participation in the policy-making process is also increasing as a result of the evolution of the contemporary public administration paradigm that is shifting towards a collaborative approach. The New Public Governance highlights the importance of cooperation between governments, communities, the private sector, academia, the media, and civil society groups to create policies that are responsive to public demands (Malik et al., 2026).

Policy arguments are a crucial component of the policy-making process because they provide a foundation for sustaining policy decisions among several viable options. In Hantono (2024), policymakers and policy analysts are the two main actors in the policy process who need strong reasons to convince others of the need and effectiveness of a policy. Policy arguments are not only based on facts and real evidence, but are also influenced by the narratives created by the actors. The narrative approach to public policy suggests that public perception of a policy issue is shaped by the use of certain narratives, experiences, and interpretations by policy actors (Smith-Walter & Jones, 2020). The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) systematically studies the narrative elements and strategies that policy actors use to advance their agendas through narrative structures consisting of setting, characters, storylines, and moral messages (Neto & Barcelos, 2020; Ruff, 2025).

In addition to narratives, coalitions between actors with similar interests and beliefs also have a significant impact on the development of policy arguments. The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, describes how groups of actors can form coalitions to promote specific policy goals (Haar & Pierce, 2021; Pierce et al., 2020). Government representatives, academics, the media, civil society organizations, the private sector, and other interest groups can form coalitions to develop and disseminate arguments in support of specific policy agendas to influence decision-making processes.

Although studies have examined the roles of actors, stakeholders, policy narratives, and advocacy coalitions separately, there are significant research gaps in understanding how these four elements interact simultaneously in shaping public policy arguments. Existing studies tend to isolate actor-stakeholder analysis from narrative and coalition analysis, thus failing to provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of policy argumentation (Kurniawan et al., 2022; Sartika & Yogopriyatno, 2024). In addition, research in the context of Indonesian public policy is still limited in applying the theoretical framework of NPF and ACF in an integrated manner. Departing from these gaps, this study aims to examine the influence of actors and stakeholders on the formation of public policy arguments through an integrative review of the Narrative Policy Framework and the Advocacy Coalition Framework. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution by offering an analytical framework that connects actor-stakeholder dynamics with narrative and coalition perspectives in the public policy process.

Public policy can be understood as a series of steps made and implemented by the government to address social problems. According to Mansur (2021), public policy includes the process of identifying problems, developing alternative solutions, decision-making, implementation, and policy assessment. This process is influenced by a number of political, economic, social, and cultural issues that shape the final policy direction. Policy formulation is an important phase in the policy cycle because it sets the direction of policy implementation. The quality of the formulation process, including the definition of issues, the formulation of alternatives, and the determination of policy choices, has a significant impact on the success of a policy (Widodo, 2021). In this context, public policy cannot be separated from the participation of various individuals and groups who have interests in the topic being discussed, so that the policy arena becomes a field for contestation of various arguments and interests.

Policy actors are individuals, organizations, or groups that have interests and the ability to influence the making, implementation, and assessment of public policies (Béland & Haelg, 2020). From a contemporary public policy perspective, policy actors include the government as well as a variety of other entities including interest groups, academics, the media, business institutions, and civil society organizations. Asfiah et al. (2024) distinguishes two main players in the policy-making process: policymakers responsible for agenda-setting, policy-making, adoption, implementation, and assessment; and policy analysts involved in issue definition, forecasting, suggestion, monitoring, and evaluation of policies. Michael (2023) added that non-governmental actors are just as important in shaping policy as official government entities. Through advocacy, information sharing, public opinion formation, and engagement in policy forums, interest groups, media, academics, civil society organizations, and the private sector can have a significant impact on the policy-making process. However, it should be noted that not all actors have equal power and resources in influencing policy, resulting in a hierarchy of power in the policy arena.

Stakeholders are defined as parties who have the ability to influence or be influenced by a public policy. Davila (2024) proposes stakeholder theory that emphasizes that

organizations must consider the interests of all parties affected by the decisions taken. Meanwhile, Rodrigues (2023) distinguishes between normatively legitimate stakeholders (with moral rights to the organization) and derivative stakeholders (who affect the organization and other normative stakeholders). In the context of public policy, stakeholder analysis is very important to determine key players in the policy-making process and understand the relationships between stakeholders in the policy network. Chiwala et al. (2025) shows that stakeholder mapping reveals variations in the level of interest and power among actors, which affect the dynamics of argumentation in policy formulation. Stakeholder participation in the policy-making process is also emphasized by the New Public Governance paradigm, which positions the government as a facilitator of collaborating with various stakeholders to create inclusive and participatory policies (Torfing et al., 2020).

Policy argumentation is the process of creating arguments, supporting data, and justifications that support or oppose a policy choice. Convincing decision-makers and the general public that a policy is appropriate to address social problems is a key goal of policy argumentation. In reality, values, ideologies, political interests, and public perceptions all impact policy arguments in addition to empirical evidence. Because public policy involves a variety of actors with different interests, policy arguments are often an arena of ideas contestation where each player aims to create an argument that will strengthen their position. Desrinelti et al. (2021) emphasizes that public policy is basically an argument, not just the application of analytical methods. The effectiveness of policy proposals throughout the decision-making process depends heavily on the power of reasoning and the ability of actors to convince others of the validity of their arguments.

The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) is a policy analysis framework that systematically studies the role of narrative in the policy process. According to Syukri et al. (2023) NPF argues that narratives play a central role in shaping public opinion and influencing policy decisions. NPF is based on five core assumptions: social construction, limited relativity, generalizable structural elements, narrative operations at three levels (micro, meso, macro), and the homo narrans model in which narrative is the way individuals process information and understand the world (Stauffer, 2023). According to NPF, the policy narrative is shaped by four main components: setting, characters, plot, and moral message. Characters in policy narratives can be categorized as heroes, villains, and victims, which are used by actors to frame policy issues according to their interests. NPF has been applied in various policy contexts in various countries, including Indonesia, to analyze how policy actors use narratives in the policy arena (Istiqoh et al., 2022).

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), developed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith in the 1980s, views the policy process as a competition between a coalition of actors advocating beliefs about policy problems and solutions (Jenkins-Smith & Weible, 2025). The ACF argues that actors with similar policy core beliefs form advocacy coalitions to compete for influence in the policy subsystem. This coalition can consist of government representatives, academics, the media, civil society organizations, the private sector, and other interest groups. The ACF identifies three structural categories in belief systems: deep

core (fundamental normative axiom), policy core (causal perception and basic strategy), and secondary aspects (instrumental considerations of implementation). Coalitions are formed around policy core beliefs, and policy changes are seen as the transformation of hegemonic belief systems in policy subsystems (Weible et al., 2023). ACF has become one of the most influential policy process theories, with more than 80 empirical applications in various policy areas and countries.

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review method. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aims to understand in depth the mechanisms and dynamics of the influence of actors and stakeholders in the formation of public policy arguments through the synthesis of previous research findings. Systematic literature review allows researchers to comprehensively collect, evaluate, and synthesize a variety of relevant scientific sources (Williams et al., 2021).

The research data is in the form of secondary data obtained from articles from national journals accredited by SINTA, international journals indexed by Scopus, academic books, conference proceedings, and relevant policy documents. The literature search was conducted through the Google Scholar, Scopus, SINTA, and GARUDA databases using the keywords *policy actors*, *stakeholders*, *policy argumentation*, *Narrative Policy Framework*, *Advocacy Coalition Framework*, *policy actor*, *stakeholders*, and *public policy argumentation*. The selected literature is a publication for 2020–2026 with priority on the latest and reputable sources. The selection process is carried out based on inclusion criteria, namely: (1) having relevance to the research topic; (2) using a clear theoretical or empirical approach; and (3) published in reputable academic journals or publishers. Meanwhile, literature that does not focus on the public policy process, in the form of opinion articles without a scientific basis, or has low methodological quality, is excluded from the analysis process. Based on the selection process, as many as 35 scientific articles and 8 books were declared to meet the criteria for analysis.

Data analysis is carried out using thematic content analysis through three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The analysis process is directed to identify the pattern of relationships between actors, stakeholders, policy narratives, and the formation of advocacy coalitions in public policy arguments. The Narrative Policy Framework is used to analyze narrative elements that include the setting, characters, plot, and moral of the story, while the Advocacy Coalition Framework is used to identify the formation of advocacy coalitions, belief systems, and the dynamics of interaction between actors in the policy subsystem. The credibility of the research results is maintained through triangulation of sources by comparing various findings from different literature as well as trail audits to ensure that the analysis process takes place systematically and consistently.

Results and Discussion

Formal and Informal Actors in the Policy Argumentation Arena

Based on the synthesis of the literature, there is a significant power dynamic between formal and informal actors in the process of forming public policy arguments. Formal actors such as the government, legislature, and bureaucracy occupy a dominant position because they have formal legal authority to set policy goals and make decisions. This institutional power allows formal actors to frame policy arguments in accordance with the government's agenda through various regulatory instruments and state resources. However, the findings suggest that the dominance of formal actors often leads to top-down policy arguments and limited space for non-governmental actors to participate meaningfully. Government actors have a dominant role as a major player with a high level of importance and power, while the involvement of non-government actors tends to be limited to a supporting role.

On the other hand, informal actors such as academics, the media, civil society organizations, and interest groups contribute in different ways in shaping policy arguments. Academics provide scientific research and studies that can form the basis for policy proposals, while the media has a strategic role in shaping public opinion and disseminating knowledge about policy issues. Civil society organizations and interest groups promote issues that are important to the groups they represent through advocacy and public campaigns (Nurjaman, 2025). Despite not having formal decision-making capacity, informal actors are able to influence the content of the arguments that arise during the policy process through these actions. Coordination and communication between stakeholders are the key to success in the implementation of public policies, lack of good coordination between stakeholders can hinder policy effectiveness.

The Influence of Policy Narrative on Argumentation through NPF

The Narrative Policy Framework provides a powerful analytical lens for understanding how policy actors use narratives as strategic tools in policy argumentation. The findings of the study show that narratives are not just rhetorical ornaments, but rather a fundamental mechanism that actors use to construct meaning, set agendas, and mobilize public support. The policy narrative consists of structural elements that can be analyzed systematically: a setting that establishes the context of the problem, characters that identify the perpetrators of the policy issue as heroes, criminals, or victims, a plot that connects cause and effect, and a moral message (moral of the story) that offers solutions. Policy actors deliberately manipulate these elements to strengthen their argumentative positions. Governments, for example, often frame themselves as heroes fighting for the public welfare, while policy opponents are portrayed as a source of problems or a hindrance to progress.

The research of Khotami et al. (2023) about COVID-19 handling policies in Pekanbaru shows how narratives by government and community actors in online news media affect pandemic handling policies. The findings confirm that the stronger the narrative that actors build, the greater the chances of the argument gaining public support and policy legitimacy. Kurniawan et al. (2022) in their bibliometric study showed that NPF research in Indonesia

is still limited and concentrated on the analysis of actors and stakeholders in the production of policy narratives, so there is an opportunity to develop more in-depth studies on the mechanisms of narrative persuasion and the effectiveness of narrative strategies in various policy contexts. NPF aims to bridge the gap between structural and post-structural approaches in policy studies through a systematic empirical analysis of narrative elements.

Formation of Advocacy Coalitions and Their Impact on Policy Arguments

The Advocacy Coalition Framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how actors with similar core policy beliefs form coalitions to promote specific policy agendas. The synthesis findings show that advocacy coalitions often compete to shape policy during the policy-making process through the development of arguments that are considered most relevant to the topic being discussed. Coalitions are formed around policy core beliefs that include the orientation of basic values, assessments of the seriousness of the problem, the underlying causes of the problem, and the preferred solution. Advocacy coalitions provide evidence that policy arguing is a multi-actor communal process in which compromise, negotiation, and sharing of ideas among coalition members often lead to differences of opinion that arise in policy. The strength and cohesiveness of the coalition that supports an argument has a significant impact on its ability to influence policy.

In the Indonesian context, the dynamics of advocacy coalitions are reflected in various policy issues, ranging from environmental policy to social policy. Coalitions of civil society, academic institutions, and the media often collaborate to advocate for policies that favor the public interest, while coalitions made up of government and private sector actors tend to promote policies that are more oriented towards economic growth and political stability. Actors can improve their standing in the policy-making process by forming alliances and pooling their networks, resources, and knowledge. However, the findings also show that dominant coalitions in the policy arena tend to monopolize public arguments and limit opposition coalitions' access to policy resources and forums. This poses a challenge to deliberative democracy because alternative arguments often do not get adequate space in the decision-making process.

Integrative Analysis: The Interaction of Actors, Stakeholders, Narratives, and Coalitions in Policy Arguments

The synthesis of the research findings shows that public policy arguments are formed through complex interactions between four dimensions: the power of actors, the configuration of stakeholder interests, the construction of narratives, and the dynamics of advocacy coalitions. These dimensions do not operate in isolation, but rather reinforce and build on each other in the process of policy argumentation. Actors with high institutional power have a greater capacity to define the dominant narrative and form strong coalitions, while actors with limited power must use persuasive narrative strategies and build inclusive coalitions to strengthen the influence of their arguments. Policy managers must pay attention to not only normative stakeholders who have moral rights, but also derivative

stakeholders who have the potential to influence normative stakeholders, as both play an important role in the dynamics of policy argumentation.

These findings confirm that an integrated analytical approach through NPF and ACF provides a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of policy argumentation compared to an analysis that isolates one of the dimensions. This integrative framework allows researchers to see how the narrative that actors construct is not only an individual expression, but also a collective product of advocacy coalitions that share similar policy core beliefs. In contrast, the formation and maintenance of coalitions also relies on the actors' ability to build a convincing narrative to recruit members and mobilize public support. In this context, stakeholder analysis becomes an important instrument for mapping the positions and interests of various actors in the policy arena, while the NPF and ACF provide analytical tools to understand the mechanisms of persuasion and coalition mobilization that underlie policy arguments.

Conclusion

Based on analysis and discussion, this study concludes several key findings. First, public policy arguments are the result of complex interactions between various actors and stakeholders with different interests, resources, and levels of influence. Formal actors such as government, legislatures, and bureaucracies have the power to determine policy direction through institutional authority, while informal actors such as academics, the media, civil society organizations, and interest groups contribute through research-based advocacy, public opinion formation, and strategic campaigns. Second, the Narrative Policy Framework shows that policy actors strategically use narrative elements (setting, character, plot, moral message) to frame policy issues and legitimize desired policy alternatives, showing that policy arguments are not only rational-technocratic but also narrative-persuasive. Third, the Advocacy Coalition Framework reveals that actors with similar core policy beliefs form advocacy coalitions to compete for policy dominance through coordinated argumentation strategies, so that policy argumentation is a collective process that involves negotiation and compromise between coalitions. Fourth, stakeholder analysis shows that actors with high power and high interests (key players) exert a disproportionate influence on the content and direction of policy argumentation, while actors with limited power but strong interests must use persuasive narratives and coalition tactics to strengthen their argumentation positions.

This study recommends several things for policy development and further research. For policy practitioners, it is recommended to open up a wider space for participation for non-governmental actors in the policy formulation process to ensure inclusive and representative policy arguments. For the next researcher, it is recommended to conduct empirical research with a case study approach on specific policy issues in Indonesia to test and develop the integrative framework of NPF and ACF proposed in this study. In addition, further research can explore local cultural and contextual dimensions in the formation of public policy arguments, as well as develop valid measurement instruments to measure the effectiveness of narrative and coalition strategies in influencing policy outcomes.

Comparative research between sector and inter-regional policies is also recommended to enrich understanding of the dynamics of policy argumentation in various contexts.

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