

Action Coalition Framework and Climate Policy: Why Environmentalists are Losing the War

Pol 253 Introduction to Public Policy
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Canada used to lead the charge on the international stage, when it came to climate change policy. The government and Canadians felt like it was their duty to preserve their earth, as there is only one. For a time there was great success, almost every goal that Canada set after UN climate summits were reached. Canada even signed the ambitious Kyoto protocol in 1997 promising to reduce the national outputs of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by 6%. Yet when the 2000s arrived, we saw no drop in GHG levels in fact there was an increase in most provinces. The federal government quickly started to abandon the goals of the protocol, and in fact began to relax a lot of the regulation already in place. By the time the Conservative government was in power, all hopes of becoming more environmentally sustainable was lost, with the Harper government withdrawing from the protocol in 2011. What happened? It is easy to blame the government, but the government only acts as an agent that the people or principal actor(s) elected to make decisions on our behalf. Therefore we actually can band together and influence the decisions made by government, said influences then turn into policy. That is the basic premise of Paul Sabatier's 'Advocacy Coalition Framework', people form coalitions with a set of core beliefs and then use different methods to influence policy change that suits their beliefs. Factors like stable parameters, strategy, external events, and resources (wealth and manpower) are all part of the ACF. The resistance to change of the stable parameters, the change in external events after the liberal defeat in 2006, and an abundance of resources for the energy coalitions have led to climate policy inaction.

First of all it is important to understand the core beliefs of both camps. Pro-energy simply believes that making environmental regulation more stringent will destroy the energy sector, translating into thousands of lost jobs and billions of dollars lost. Thus, they believe that the status-quo (Harper's policies before he left office) should be maintained as the energy sector is not being crippled by taxes and restrictions. The environmentalist coalition believes that the policies in place are very lenient, and that there should be a reduction of GHG. This will be achieved by placing heavy taxes on carbon emissions, preventing further petroleum projects in Canada, and transitioning to green energy. Who forms part of these coalitions? For pro-energy it is basically any and all oil and gas companies operating in Canada that is around 100 companies, however "the majority of production, refining and marketing is done by fewer than 20 of them." (Natural Resources Canada. 2009. Web) Provinces that profit from oil and gas like Alberta, Ontario, and the Maritimes also form part of this group. Finally all those who work in the industry would also form part of the pro-energy group according to the government "Natural resources directly and indirectly account for almost one-fifth of nominal GDP and 1.8 million jobs." (Natural Resources Canada 2015 Web) The pro-environment coalition is much more diverse, consisting of numerous grass roots organizations and NGOs, 43 of which are major Canadian environmental associations (no statistics on membership). British Columbia, Quebec, and the Territories also consider themselves members of the green movement. Both of these camps have outside lobbying groups, and members representing them in government via parliamentary membership.

Now that the core beliefs and basics demographics of the groups have been dealt with, it is time to address the issue of why the pro-energy group is so far winning the war. One of the first concepts introduced in Sabatier's ACF is the 'Relatively Stable Parameters' these areas "limit(s) the range of feasible alternatives or otherwise affect the resources and beliefs of subsystem actors."(Sabatier 135) These remain unchanged over long periods of time; they include basic attributes of the good, distribution of natural resources, fundamental values and social structure, and basic legal structures. Energy coalitions have been around for much longer, and thus have had time to mould themselves to the stable parameters.

1. *The Good.* The good in question here are the natural gas and oil deposits found in the various provinces of this country, constitutionally resource management is devolved to the provincial government. Energy coalitions therefore place a great deal of emphasis on provincial negotiations. Especially companies that specialize in developing a resource, Alberta being prime example province-corporation negotiations. Environmentalist coalitions being much younger than Oil companies tend to focus too much on the federal level of government, forgetting that it is the province that makes the ultimate decision. Thus more emphasis should be placed of provincial lobbying if the ultimate goal is to stop resource exploitation.

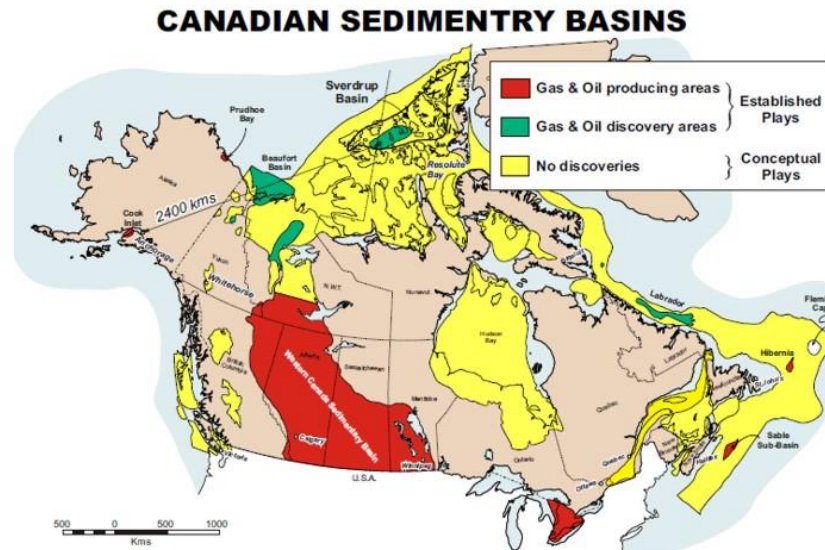


Figure 1 the problem 'area' is the deposits which are controlled by the province, free of federal intervention. <https://www.spec2000.net/text100fp/cdnoilmap.jpg>

2. *Distribution.* We see that most of the resources are concentrated around the prairies, and southern Ontario which has some of the highest levels population densitites in canada. Coincidentally some of these provnvinces have the highest levels of wealth and very high standards of living. The energy sector creates a lot of jobs in these areas both directly and indrectly this creates a bastions of support for the coalitions, as workers fear their job security and high standards of living if more regulatory policies are implemented. Centralization of the resource has made it easy for coaltions to establish headquarters in key regions. Environmentalist coaltions are very disperced creating a lack of uniformity and action, also because these coaltions are more altusitic in nature there is not as much support as they do not provide jobs or contribute to the economy.
3. *Values and Social Structure.* Canada is a commodity based economy, most Canadians know this and thanks to these commodities we are able to have the essential goods and services that make us happy and healthy. Canadians place a high value on these services not only that but Canadian culture is also highly dependent on cars, which run off petrol.

Increased taxes, restrictions and regulations on the energy sector threaten the economy and in turn threaten Canadian values and way of life. This is the picture that energy coalitions paint when they speak to the people and the government, highly effective rhetoric. Environmentalists therefore have a hard time entrenching their ideas into Canadian values and society, because their opposition makes them sound incompatible.

4. *Legal Structure.* An area that is extremely hard to change especially in Canada where legislative and judicial powers are clearly divided between the feds and the provinces. Once again energy coalitions do not have to necessarily focus on federal politics, as provinces have so much autonomy. Courts cannot force governments to release information pertaining to negotiations between government and coalitions. Thus we see an affinity from the part of oil companies and interest groups for secret negotiations. Also it is worth mentioning that cabinet solidarity prevents government ministries from speaking out against the government, therefore an oil friendly government is often endorsed by companies in the industry come election time.

Stable parameters remain unchanged for a very long time, but external events can change over a couple of years. External events also carry with them a high level of uncertainty forcing coalitions “to anticipate and to respond to them in a manner consistent with their basic beliefs and interests.”(Sabatier 136) The liberal defeat by the conservatives at the federal level, and economic growth in resource rich provinces are some of the external events that favoured the energy coalition over the climate advocacy coalitions.

1. *Socio-economic conditions.* Canada saw increased population growth during the 90s and the early 2000s, mostly via international migration. Consequently this also increased the need for fossil fuels as a source of energy “Currently, more than one-third (37.6%) of our total energy demand is still met by refined petroleum products...This

ratio has not

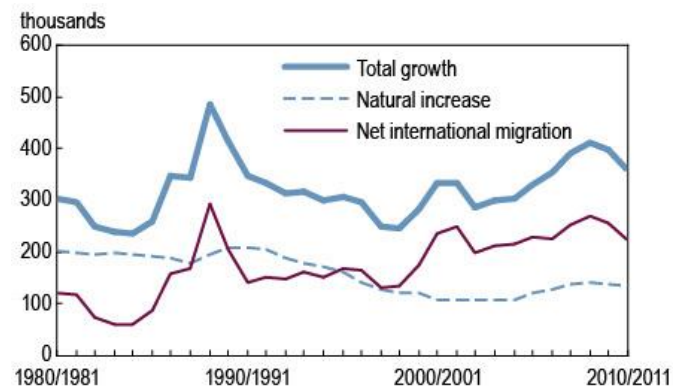


Figure 3 Growth of the Canadian population.
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/12-581-x/2012000/c-g/c-g1-eng.jpg>

since 1990.”(Statistics Canada, 2009.

Web) Reliance of fossil fuels dropped when the 2000s hit, as provinces like British Columbia and Quebec started to shift more towards the renewable energies. However, production facilities and the transportation sector still heavily relied on fossil fuels areas that see increased expansion and demand when the population increases. There was also

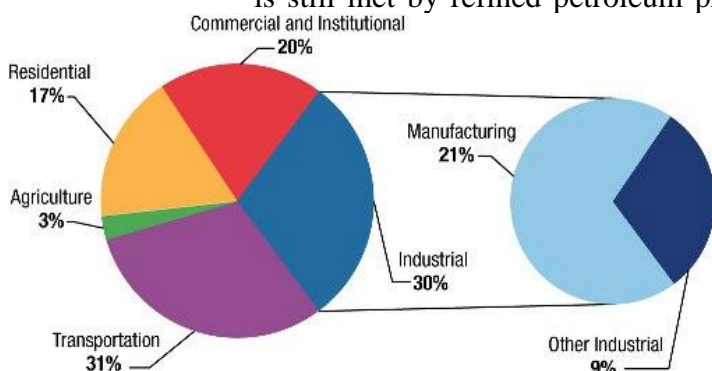


Figure 2 Sectors that consume fossil fuels for energy.
<https://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/Publications/statistics/ice08/images/fig1.jpg>

increased economic growth in the country as a whole but one province in particular stood out, Alberta. In 2006 it was reported that “Alberta's economy grew by 6.8 per cent in 2006, which was more than double the national average. Employment rose by 4.8 per cent, bringing Alberta's unemployment rate to 3.4 per cent, the lowest in the country.” (Cywinski, 2007. Web) This trend continued making Alberta one of the richest provinces in Canada, thanks to the oil sands and as a result Canada as a whole prospered. This period of steady economic and social growth made green policy lobbying very difficult, factor in technology's inability to efficiently transition the manufacturing and transportation sector

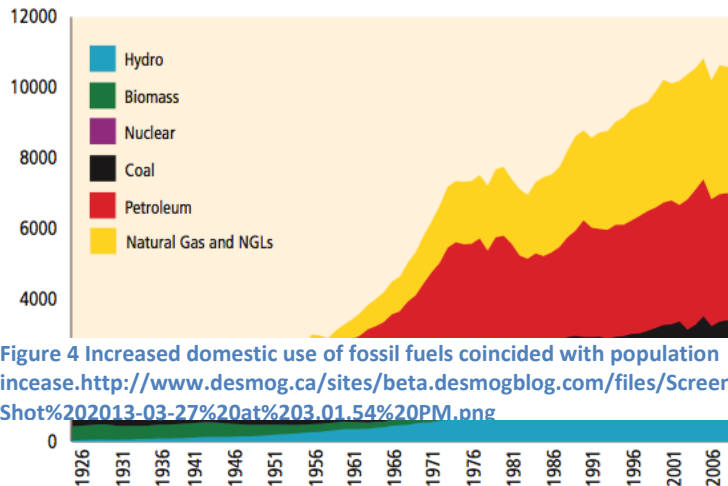


Figure 4 Increased domestic use of fossil fuels coincided with population increase. <http://www.desmog.ca/sites/beta.desmogblog.com/files/Screen%20Shot%202013-03-27%20at%203.01.54%20PM.png>

Figure ES2. Domestic Consumption of Primary Energy, 1926-2009
(Data compiled by Trottier staff from Statistics Canada and Steward (1978))

population growth. Yet it tried to champion climate change, singing the Kyoto protocol and setting ambitious goals for a greener Canada. When the conservatives took over we saw a steady decrease in environmental stewardship and even the retraction of Canada from the Kyoto protocol. Stephen Harper's political roots are from Alberta naturally he would oppose policy that could potentially hinder the booming oil industry of the province. As such he took it upon himself to serve the main supporters of his campaign, the conservative base that tends to favour business over environment and the oil companies that have huge stakes in Alberta oil sands. He began cutting the budget for the ministries in charge of protecting the environment crippling their administrative abilities. The cuts happened during “closed-door discussions that led to an estimated \$60 million in cuts at Environment Canada in the 2012 federal budget” (De Souza, 2013. Web) Not only that but they scrapped funding for research groups promoting carbon taxing, and alternative sources of energy. We can see here that the Conservatives had a different agenda than the liberals; they began a cycle of policy inaction squelching contradictory data on the current state of the environment. The ideologies that the party holds are very in line with that of the many energy coalitions, which is why they are some of the biggest donors to the conservative party.

to green energy. This created a climate of environmental irresponsibility because things were going so well due to increased demand for fossil fuels, and with the liberals leaving office there was no chance of advancement as we will see in the next section.

2. *Changes in governing.* As mentioned before, the liberal party was in power for thirteen years (1993-2006) during which it saw substantial economic and

Coalitions are unable to influence stable parameters, however the energy coalitions are much older than the environmental coalitions and thus have had more time to adapt to the parameters and work in them. External events favour the energy coalitions due to pure economic stability and population growths, naturally leading increased demand for national and international use. Also, governments will serve their electorate by passing or not passing policy they see favourable; such was the conservative mandate on climate policy as they tend to listen more to oil tycoons. But ultimately beliefs must become policy for these coalitions. That can only be realised with resources, there are two important ones: money and manpower. Money is one of the most abundant and powerful resource that energy coalitions have at their disposal, its versatility is what allows them to be ahead of the game. Most of the time they use it as shares of the company, giving politicians and anyone that stands in their way a small share of the company. Other times it comes in the form of a consultant position within a company, this form of monetary enticement is offered mostly to retired politicians as they would be the most knowledgeable at how to efficiently lobby the government, or how best to get via policy loopholes. Manpower is what they use to get their voice out, the ability mobilize support for their cause anywhere in Canada. Their manpower ranges from the oil rig worker to the white-collar businessman, all of them having particular tasks to perform, whether it is lobbying the government or getting workers to protest new regulations on oil sands. Their extensive resources and cohesiveness is unparalleled, it is this level of organization that environmental coalitions still have not been able to achieve.

As of now things are actually looking brighter for the environmentalist coalitions than ever before, there is disappointment among Canadians after ten years of Harper reversed all progress Canada achieved in reducing GHG emissions. The new liberal government has made promises to go green and move Canada back into the vanguard of climate advocacy; however this does not mean that everything has been solved for the environmentalist coalitions. There are still some key issues that they need to address if they want to rival the influence that energy coalitions have.

1. First their manifesto is not unitary, unlike energy coalitions that agree to keep the status quo because that is what has worked well so far. The energy coalitions are too diverse, some want total reduction of fossil fuels effectively removing the industry from Canada, others want tougher restrictions and more liability placed on oil companies. Lack of consensus creates a lack of action, and in a world where policy windows are open for only a little while this can spell defeat for most coalitions.
2. Second, they lack centralization. Most of the energy coalitions can focus on many areas because they have plethora of money and manpower. Most environmentalist coalitions are NGOs and therefore lack the required funds to branch off and maintain considerable influence. They need to pick one province or one level of government and focus all of their resources there; this in turn can have greater influence on policy.
3. Third, they need to work more with the stable parameters mostly with the basic legal structure portion. They need to be more active in bringing companies to court for their environmental negligence, and even the government if it begins to pass policy that could

potentially degrade Canadian ecosystems. Being vocal does not mean one can only protest, in fact in this modern era the most effective protests are done behind closed doors.

These are just a few areas of improvement that could potentially assist the environmentalist in their fight for policy supremacy. Strength of stable parameters, a sharp turn in external events in Canada, and sheer money and manpower has aided the energy coalitions in successful government lobbying. Yet it is not all dark for people that want to see a greener Canada, Harper's government gave Canada a black eye internationally when it came to climate change. This made Canadians more environmentally conscious than before reinvigorating environmentalist coalition and adding to their support base. All that has to be done now is slight modifications to uniformity, centralization, and judicial activism. By doing so Canada can be launched back into the forefront of climate advocacy, and regain its lost prestige.

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