

## CHAPTER 1

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# Introducing the Narrative Policy Framework

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### Introduction

You will stir up little controversy by asserting that human beings are storytelling animals. We all have at least a rough accounting of what a story is. Stories progress from beginnings, through middles, and have endings. They are composed of characters. There is a plot situating the story and characters in time and space, where events interact with the actions of the characters and the world around them to make the story worthy of telling in the first place. We have all told stories. We have all listened to stories. Indeed, even our thoughts and emotions seem bound by the structure of story. It is not surprising then that whole academic disciplines have been devoted to the study of story and that whole careers have been largely dedicated to a single story or a single storyteller such as William Shakespeare or Mark Twain. We are thus, in a sense, *homo narrans*, and there is something about story—or narrative—that feels uniquely human. Consider this: pause for a moment and try to imagine communication without story . . . .

We expect that during your pause such a speculation was hard to fathom. If stories are so constitutive of human existence that we could easily consider them distinct aspects of the human condition and so fundamental that we cannot easily imagine communication without them, then it follows that stories are, at the very least, important. And if stories are important for us as individuals, then it also probably follows that stories must play an important role for groups and the collective actions in which these groups engage, such as those present in the processes, outcomes, implementation, and designs of public policy. It is

from this seemingly banal premise that the narrative policy framework (NPF) was born. Let's briefly consider some possible examples of the role of stories in public policy.

A short yet devastatingly powerful story resides in the famous letter Apostle Paul wrote to the Christian Church of Rome (Romans 1:24–32). The story goes something like this: many in Rome had turned away from God to worship “. . . the creature more than the creator.” In their love of the earthly creature, men and women had succumbed to “vile affections” that “burned in their lust” for their same sex and were “worthy of death.” The staying power of this story is seen through its citation by present-day anti-gay stakeholders, such as the Westboro Baptist Church, that use this biblical story to motivate its members to mobilize against homosexuals by engaging in activities such as protests at the funerals of recently deceased American service personnel. Thus, it is fairly easy to conclude that the reach of Apostle Paul's narrative is great, reverberating through history to shape and impact the lives of millions of homosexuals through public policies and the actions of their implementers. Bear in mind, not a single shred of scientific evidence exists that would indicate homosexuals have turned away from a deity of any sort; yet the persecution of homosexuals via sanctioned public policy continues. This is an example of the power of narrative. Scanning the policy topography, it is not hard to find similarly compelling examples.

In 1949, Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield published psychological studies assessing the power of World War II educational and propaganda films. Examining films such as the *Battle for Britain*, the researchers concluded that the narratives within these films may very well have been powerful enough to have influenced the “almost superhuman efforts of the British people and the Royal Air Force . . . to {never} give up even in the face of apparently hopeless odds” (Hovland et al. 1949, p. 24, cited in Green and Brock 2005, p. 121). More recently, Oreskes and Conway (2010) spin a much less optimistic tale than Hovland and his colleagues. Using historic examples of how scientific doubt was manufactured to shape public opinion about acid rain, the dangers of smoking, and the ozone hole, Oreskes and Conway chronicle the strategic use of narrative and other forms of communication to similarly manufacture doubt about climate change. While the linkages between narrative and policy outcomes is tenuous in the Hovland et al. (1949) and Oreskes and Conway (2010) examples, research findings across a collection of academic disciplines are making it possible to begin to make such connections in a scientifically verifiable manner. The NPF incorporates these findings to do just that.

Research findings that speak to the importance of narrative in public policy can be found across many academic disciplines. Marketing research shows that narrative advertising techniques are more persuasive than other techniques such as price point advertising (e.g., Mattila 2000). Furthermore, findings in communication (e.g., Morgan et al. 2009) and psychology (e.g., Green and Brock 2005) show that the more a person becomes immersed in a story the more persuasive the story. Findings in political science also show that individuals use narrative structures to cognitively organize new information (Berinsky and Kinder 2006).

Neuroscience, which has increasingly become involved in the study of narrative, has a large collection of studies showing the importance of narrative for individual autobiographical memory, self-conceptions, its role in establishing reasoning for individual actions (see Walker 2012), and has also made considerable progress in mapping the areas of the brain responsible for narrative processing (see Mar 2004). While literary scholars (see Herman 2009) have pioneered the theories used to study narrative, the recent trend in most academic disciplines is toward increased methodological sophistication and more generalizable findings, all of which have begun to provide for a scientific understanding of narrative and its role in human understanding and behaviors. Until 2010, when NPF was formally named, the academic discipline of public policy was an outlier in terms of this trend.

To be clear, a considerable amount of scholarship was produced in the 1990s that examined the role of narrative in shaping public policy. During this time, narrative theorizing was pioneered by scholars such as Emery Roe (1994), Deborah Stone (1989), Frank Fischer and J. Forrester (1993), and Maarten Hajer (1995). However, this brand of narrative scholarship—termed in the policy field “post-positive”—was primarily interpretative in the sense that it was highly descriptive, generally rejected scientific standards of hypothesis testing and falsifiability, and thus lacked the clarity to be replicated and allow for generalization. Mainstream policy scholarship by and large rejected this interpretative approach, which created a de facto division in the field that left the mainstream abandoning narrative to the post-positivists. This line in the sand is clearly illuminated with the publication of Paul Sabatier’s edited book *Theories of the Policy Process* in 1999, which specifically excluded work in social construction and narrative. When challenged about the exclusion of social construction and narrative from the edited volume (e.g., Radaelli 2000), Sabatier crystallized the emerging division in public policy with a stern admonishment, stating that he had no interest in popularizing an approach to public policy that could not be “clear enough to be wrong” (2000, p. 137). Sabatier was right in the sense that post-positive scholarship wasn’t clear enough to be wrong; but the post-positivists were right about one thing: narrative matters and the science supporting their interpretative descriptions is ubiquitous just about everywhere but public policy. NPF was born out of these events and, at the most basic level, NPF is an attempt to apply objective methodological approaches (i.e., science) to subjective social reality (i.e., policy narratives). In other words, like the post-positivists, we think narrative seems to matter for public policy; however, unlike the post-positivists, we think the best way to discern how, when, and why, is through the use of the scientific method.

### NPF’s Ontology and Epistemology

The debate between mainstream public policy scholarship and the post-positivists is not new. In fact, these foundational disagreements present in the public policy literature are found elsewhere and date at least as far back as the Sophists and Socrates and are derivative of ancient arguments about the nature of reality and

how best we can understand that reality, or in philosophical terms, ontology and epistemology, respectively. Although perhaps a bit esoteric, there have been misrepresentations of NPF in the policy literature (e.g., Miller 2012); thus, for the sake of clarity, it is worthwhile to dedicate a few lines of text to spell out NPF's take on what reality is (ontology) and how we can come to understand that reality (epistemology) before we delve into the specifics of the framework itself.

Simply put, NPF applies an objective epistemology (i.e., science) to a subjective ontology (social reality) (Radaelli et al. 2012, p. 2). While we do believe there is a real world out there bound by natural laws such as gravity, we also align with a post-positivist perspective that all concepts are not created equal and thus vary in their stability. Although some concepts like gravity are rarely contested and taken as a given, other socially constructed concepts such as race, gender, environment, and the like are often the source of heated disputes. It is precisely these less stable concepts that form the core of any policy debate. NPF accepts that much of the policy reality we aim to understand has concepts (i.e., variables) that are moving targets, with meanings that at least subtly, if not overtly, change. Thus, we accept there is an objective world out there, but we also more fundamentally accept that when it comes to public policy, what that world *means* varies tremendously. Given what we know about narrative's role in cognition and communication, NPF offers the simple suggestion that if you want to understand that meaning, you need to understand the policy narratives relevant players use to make sense of their policy reality. NPF uses an objective epistemology, meaning that we use scientific methods to study the variation in socially constructed realities. We never claim to identify which narrative is right, only that we can systematically study the variation of policy narratives in such a way that is clear enough to be wrong and that said variation may eventually help us explain policy outcomes, processes, and designs. Or, as noted in Smith and Larimer (2013, p. 233), work on NPF demonstrates "how a post-positivist theoretical framework might be employed to generate hypotheses that can be empirically tested." In sum, NPF understands that narrative truths are socially constructed and that these policy realities may be systematically and empirically studied.

## **An Overview of the Narrative Policy Framework<sup>1</sup>**

### ***The Problem of Narrative Relativity***

Narrative scholars have commonly drawn a distinction between narrative *form* and *content* (see Jones and McBeth 2010). Narrative form refers to the structure of a narrative, while narrative content refers to the objects contained therein. This distinction is useful for NPF's operationalization of narrative because it illuminates both the methodological and theoretical obstacles that NPF must address in its efforts to scientifically study policy narratives.

Perhaps beginning with Aristotle's *Poetics*, structuralist accounts of narrative speak to narrative form by asserting that there are distinct generalizable narrative components such as characters and plot that exist across different contexts (e.g.,

Genette 1983; Propp 1968; Saussure 1965). Post-structural accounts of narrative vehemently reject such propositions, asserting that each interpretation of a narrative is *sui generis* and thus unique to the interaction between the narrative and the individual determining its meaning (e.g., Derrida 1981). Both structural and post-structural accounts of narrative agree that the content of narrative is not generalizable. We term the post-structural take on form and both the post-structural and structural takes on narrative content as the problem of narrative relativity, which is essentially an assertion that due to unique context and individual interpretation, narratives cannot be studied scientifically. In public policy scholarship, narrative relativity has been a position of orthodoxy where the study of narratives is seen as simply incompatible with the scientific method (e.g., Dodge et al. 2005).

Given that narrative relativity is no small problem, NPF offers several operational strategies to mediate and possibly overcome the problem. First, and related to narrative form, NPF takes a specifically structural position, defining generalizable and context-independent narrative elements consisting of a setting, characters, a plot, and a moral of the story. Second, while we understand that narrative content is contextual in the sense that a narrative about climate change policy cannot be morphed into a narrative about gun control, we also expect that while meaning may be relative, it is not random. Specifically, we advocate the use of tried and tested belief system measures such as Cultural Theory (e.g., Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky 1990) and ideology to look for aggregate tendencies in assigning meaning to context-specific objects (i.e., people, symbols, evidence, etc.) by audiences and narrators as well as looking for strategies whereby actors strategically manipulate narrative content to shape policy. Both belief systems and strategies are discussed in more detail below.

### ***The Form: Policy Narrative Elements***

Taking a structural stance on narrative, NPF rejects the post-structural claim that narratives are completely relative by beginning from a clear and concise operationalization of policy narratives. These narrative elements are the distinctively narrative structures of a story that separate narrative from other message structures such as lists, chronologies, frames, discourses, or memes.<sup>2</sup> Our reading of the narrative and policy literatures strongly suggests that policy narratives have some combination of a *setting*, *characters* (heroes, victims, and villains), *plots*, and a *moral of the story* (policy solution). These narrative elements are our attempt to extract generalizable structures from the existing narrative literatures dispersed across many academic disciplines. However, we do not contend that we have mined the “truth” in terms of narrative structure. Rather, we see NPF’s narrative elements as a solid baseline foundation from which initial empirical inquiries can be grounded. We suspect—rather, expect—that these initial structures will often underspecify narrative. That is, given all the narrative elements that have been identified across academic fields of inquiry (e.g., flashback, foreshadowing, *deus ex machina*, etc.), there are most certainly other elements that we have omitted.<sup>3</sup>

We expect NPF scholars to test the theoretical limitations of our four elements; we also expect that other elements will be found to play an important role in shaping policy processes and outcomes.

1. *Setting*: A policy narrative is directed toward addressing a specific policy problem and must situate that problem in a specific context. That context is the setting. Elements of the setting include but are not limited to taken-for-granted facts characterized by very low levels of disagreement, unquestioned (or at least unmovable) legal and constitutional parameters, characteristics of a specific geographic area such as nation-state boundaries, environmental characteristics, demographics, and other facts or rules that most parties agree on. In other words, the setting is the stage, and just like in most plays, people accept the stage as-is without too much thought. Research on NPF has dealt with such disparate policy issues as climate change (Jones 2013; 2014), wind energy in Massachusetts (Shanahan et al. 2013), environmental issues (Shanahan et al. 2008), US obesity policy (Husmann 2013), and US foreign policy toward El Salvador (Kusko 2013).
2. *Characters*: Policy narratives have distinct characters. Relying heavily on the work of Deborah Stone (2002) and Steven Ney (2006), NPF operationalizes characters as heroes (the potential fixer of a policy problem), villains (those who are causing the problem), and victims (those harmed by the problem). While it is common for characters to be individual humans, it is not necessary. In many cases characters are anthropomorphized abstractions or broad categories such as “the bison,” the environment, liberty, or “the people.” Several NPF studies have illuminated the role of characters within narratives in shaping individual policy opinions and preferences. For example, Jones (2013) uses an experimental design to demonstrate that the hero is the most important character in influencing citizen perceptions of climate change. Husmann (2013) has used NPF and Schneider and Ingram’s policy design theory to demonstrate that policy narratives on obesity portraying individuals as either deserving or underserving lead individuals to prefer different policy incentives.
3. *Plot*: Usually having a beginning, middle, and end, policy narrative plots connect characters to one another and to the policy setting. Of course, plots can do this in a myriad of ways. Thus, NPF does not endorse a specific operationalization of plot but has had success using Deborah Stone’s (e.g., 2002; 2012) story types. Stone’s (2012, pp. 159–168) story types include the story of decline, stymied progress, and helplessness and control. Recent NPF studies have examined plots in policy narratives in YouTube videos (McBeth et al. 2012) and a study of wind energy in Massachusetts (Shanahan et al. 2013). The McBeth et al. study (2012) found that 46 percent of the group’s YouTube videos had an identifiable plot or story type with a “helpless and control” story type being the most prevalent. Shanahan et al. (2013), in a study of the controversy over building wind turbines off

the coast of Cape Cod, found that the “control” plot and the “decline” plot were the most common in the wind energy policy dispute.

4. *Moral of the Story*: A policy narrative usually offers a policy solution in the form of a moral of the story. For example, a policy narrative about climate change might offer a solution such as nuclear energy; a policy narrative about gun violence might offer a solution such as an assault weapons ban; and, in some cases, the moral of the story is quite simply to maintain the status quo. However, it is possible that a communication would be considered a policy narrative without a solution. The goals of such policy narratives might include focusing on the uncertainty of a piece of evidence or a specification of a problem to which a solution is needed. Thus, some forms of communication have other elements of a policy narrative but no solutions. This is often found in highly contentious environmental issues. For instance, a 2012 study of the Buffalo Field Campaign (McBeth et al. 2012) found that the group promoted a solution in only 22 percent of their public consumption documents.

The most recent NPF scholarship asserts that a policy narrative will have a minimum of one character and a referent to the public policy of interest (e.g., problem, solution, evidence for, etc.) (see Shanahan et al. 2013 and McBeth et al. 2014, p. 229).

### *The Content of Policy Narratives*

#### *Belief Systems*

We have argued that few who study narrative will disagree with the notion that narrative content is relative to the context of a particular story. Jones and Song (2014) illustrate this point in a recent NPF study noting that “. . . unless one possesses the alchemical equivalent in narratology of changing lead to gold, then a story about 1990s Kosovo cannot be turned into a story about climate change” (p. 449). When aspiring to study policy narratives scientifically, this facet of narrative relativity presents significant challenges to any attempt to produce externally valid narrative content measures. While we agree the meanings imbued in specific narrative objects vary, research in belief systems has found that variation in meaning can often be systematic—which means while meaning is relative, it is usually not random. Thus, one way to mediate this facet of the problem of narrative relativity is to ground understandings of content in established deductive belief system theories.

Belief system theories allow a way to bind the understanding of specific objects within a narrative so that the variations in interpretation become explainable, and at times may even become portable across contexts. For example, suppose your policy narrative of interest conjures an image of the Christian crucifix to symbolically move audiences toward a specific policy prescription (i.e., moral of the story). If we are to believe that all content is unique, then it becomes impossible to understand the meaning of that symbol beyond one-off inquiries into what the

crucifix meant for specific individuals. However, if one invokes a robust deductive belief system theory such as cognitive psychologist George Lakoff's work on ideology (e.g., Lakoff 2002), then it becomes possible to generalize about the meaning of content as it relates to certain types of individuals. Lakoff's theory of ideology relies upon familial metaphors to make sense of how individuals understand politics and policy, where conservatism is rooted in a strict-father model of the family and liberalism is rooted in a nurturing-parent model of the family. Such models manifest very different takes on Christianity, which likely shape the meaning of Christian symbols such as the crucifix. For the strict-father conservative, the crucifix symbolizes patriarchy, authority, obedience, and protection and love should one follow the rules (Lakoff 2002, p. 246). On the other hand, for the nurturing-parent liberal, the same crucifix symbolizes nurturance, grace, empathy, and love and protection to those that exhibit the same traits (Lakoff 2002, p. 255). Of course, meaning will still vary on an individual level, but contingent upon the strength of your deductive belief system theory of choice, some component of your studied population will vary in a systematic fashion (see, for example, Barker and Tinnick 2006) and allow inferences related to the population more generally. Such an approach does not negate the problem of content narrative relativity; it does, however, mitigate it. Moreover, such an approach allows for the potential comparison of the use and interpretation of objects within policy narratives—imbedded in a specific context—with similar policy narrative objects imbedded in a wholly different context, perhaps even in an entirely different policy area. Importantly, there are a host of readymade belief system theories out there that can be tapped for such purposes.<sup>4</sup>

Informed by ACF scholarship on the importance of shared policy beliefs as an advocacy coalition's glue (e.g., Weible 2005; Weible et al. 2009), the NPF identifies both an operational measure of policy beliefs through narrative elements as well as a measure of the intensity of policy beliefs within policy narratives. The NPF has historically measured policy beliefs through the use of policy narrative characters, consistently finding statistically significant differences between opposing coalition policy beliefs, and that policy beliefs are relatively stable over time (McBeth et al. 2005; McBeth et al. 2010a; Shanahan et al. 2013). McBeth et al. (2005) operationalized the important Greater Yellowstone policy belief of federalism (what level of government should solve problems) through an analysis of competing group's listing of allies in their policy narratives. In the same study, the relationship between humans and nature was operationalized through an analysis of the victim in competing group's policy narratives. Similarly, Shanahan et al. (2013) used different heroes and victims to operationalize three policy beliefs in the Cape Cod wind energy controversy.

### *Strategy*

While a focus on deductive belief systems allows researchers to generalize about the meaning of specific policy narrative content, a focus on strategy allows researchers to generalize about the use of content within policy narratives, thus also creating a potential mediating stratagem for the problem of narrative



relativity. For our purposes, narrative strategies are understood broadly as the tactical portrayal and use of narrative elements to manipulate or otherwise control policy-related processes, involvement, and outcomes. By definition, such uses include the strategic manipulation of pre-identified NPF narrative elements such as components of the setting, characters, plots, and the moral of the story, but may also include other as of yet unspecified elements of the policy narrative. Based upon theories and approaches applied in various academic disciplines, the NPF has explored several narrative strategies including the use of narrative elements for mobilization and demobilization of support (McBeth et al. 2007), expansion and contraction of the scope of conflict (McBeth et al. 2007), heresthetics (Jones and McBeth 2010), and the devil–angel shift (Shanahan et al. 2013). Such strategies are posited to be used across policy narrative contexts and thus allow for a generalizable treatment of narrative content.

Importantly, policy narratives are strategic constructions of a policy reality promoted by policy actors that are seeking to win (or not lose) in public policy battles. Whereas, post-positivism tends to see policy narratives as relative, subject to interpretation, and thus not subject to empirical study, the NPF views policy narratives as consisting of generalizable strategic policy constructions with instrumental goals. We discuss hypotheses related to strategy in more detail in the following sections of this chapter dealing with levels of analysis.

### ***Core NPF Assumptions***

Philosophers of science have described research paradigms or programs as having core assumptions or axioms that allow for hypotheses to be developed and tested. These core assumptions, such as the individual utility maximization assumption in economics, form a basis to the scientific approach that if successfully challenged or otherwise discredited would present substantial problems for the research program for which they were asserted. While we do not contend that the NPF reaches the level of a scientific paradigm in a way that Thomas Kuhn understood it in his classic work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) or a research program as Imre Lakatos (e.g., 1974) understood the concept, we do hold that the NPF is a viable policy process framework and as such we must lay bare the assumptions that will undoubtedly underpin NPF research.

- (i) *Social construction*: While it is true that there is a reality populated by objects and processes independent of human perceptions, it is also true that what those objects and processes mean vary in terms of how humans perceive them. Social construction in this context refers to the variable meanings that individuals or groups will assign to various objects or processes associated with public policy.
- (ii) *Bounded relativity*: Social constructions of policy-related objects and processes vary to create different policy realities; however, this variation is bounded (e.g., by belief systems, ideologies, norms etc.) and thus is not random.

- (iii) *Generalizable structural elements*: The NPF takes a structuralist stance on narrative where narratives are defined as having specific generalizable structures such as plots and characters that can be identified in multiple narrative contexts.
- (iv) *Simultaneous operation at three levels*: For purposes of analysis, the NPF divides policy narratives into three interacting categories including the micro (individual-level) meso (group and coalitional-level), and macro (cultural and institutional). Policy narratives are assumed to simultaneously operate at all three levels.
- (v) *Homo narrans model of the individual*: Narrative is assumed to play a central role in how individuals process information, communicate, and reason.

### ***Three Levels of Analysis: Micro, Meso, and Macro***

Per assumption (iv), the NPF specifies three levels of analysis. These three levels include the macro level, the meso level, and the micro level. Table 1.1 details the units of analysis, relevant theories operationalized, suggested methodologies, and potential data sources for each of the three levels. While these levels are understood to operate contiguously, it is also understood that the levels are not mutually exclusive and interact in critical ways.

**Table 1.1** The NPF's three levels of analysis

	<i>Micro</i>	<i>Meso</i>	<i>Macro</i>
Unit of analysis	Individual	Group/Coalition	Institution/Culture
Core NPF variables	Policy narrative Setting Characters Plot Moral	Policy narrative Setting Characters Plot Moral	Policy narrative Setting Characters Plot Moral
Imported theories	Belief systems Canonicity and breach (In)congruence Narrative transportation Narrator trust	Belief systems Devil/Angel shift Heresthetics Policy learning Public opinion Scope of conflict	Unspecified
Known applicable methods	Experiment, interviews, focus groups, cluster analysis	Content analysis, Network analysis, Rational choice	Historical analysis, American political development
Potential data	Survey, transcripts	Written texts, speeches, videos	Archives, secondary sources, original artifacts

*Note*: This table also appears in McBeth, Jones, and Shanahan (2014).

*Micro-Level NPF: Homo Narrans*

The central tenet of the NPF's *homo narrans* model of the individual is that narrative plays a fundamental role in how human beings make sense of the world. While this central tenet is a core assumption of the NPF, the remaining postulates listed below are viewed as auxiliary to but supportive of this central NPF assumption. The *homo narrans* model of the individual is rooted primarily in political psychology (Lodge and Taber 2013) but draws generally from several other fields of inquiry (see Jones 2001 for an accessible and concise overview of this literature) including emerging research on narrative cognition (see Herman 2003). The NPF posits ten postulates for its model of the individual:<sup>5</sup>

1. *Boundedly rational*: Drawing on the classic work of Herbert Simon (e.g., Simon 1947), the NPF understands individuals to make decisions under conditions of limited time and limited information. Under such conditions, individuals satisfice, or, more simply, settle for an acceptable alternative.
2. *Heuristics*: Given bounded rationality, individuals rely on information shortcuts to process information and to facilitate decision making. These shortcuts, known as heuristics, are many, but are rooted in phenomena such as what information is available at the time, past experience, expertise and training, and biological biases (see Jones 2001, pp. 71–75; Kahneman 2011, pp. 109–255).
3. *Primacy of Affect*: As political scientist Bryan Jones (2001) observes, emotions play a critical role in focusing attention in human cognition by “highlighting what is important and setting priorities” (pp. 73–74). In this context, emotion—termed “affect” in academic parlance—is the positive to negative value that an individual ascribes to stimuli. Recent research supports Jones’ observation, finding that this positive to negative value assignment (which can be neutral) takes place some 100–250 milliseconds prior to cognition (Lodge and Taber 2007, p. 16; Lodge and Taber 2005; Morris et al. 2003). In short, affect or emotions precede reason.
4. *Two kinds of cognition*: According to psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011), cognition can be characterized as operating simultaneously, but not equally, within two systems (also see Druckman and Lupia 2000). The first system, System 1, refers to unconscious, involuntary, and automatic thought processes that we are either born with (e.g., noticing sudden movement in your peripheral vision) or learn through prolonged practice (e.g., 2+2) (Kahneman 2011, pp. 20–23). The overwhelming majority of human cognition is handled by System 1, which informs System 2 via affective cues (e.g., fear, anger, etc.). Like System 1, System 2 cognition is always active but has been evolutionarily primed to run in a low effort mode to conserve energy unless called upon. When engaged, System 2 focuses attention on cognitively cumbersome tasks that are

beyond the capacity of System 1. These operations are varied, but could include solving a complex math equation (for most, System 1 can handle 2+2), following cooking directions, or attempting to determine if somebody were telling the truth. Importantly, individuals cannot perform multiple System 2 operations simultaneously; rather, they must be conducted serially. While System 2 can recondition System 1 through updating, System 1 is stubbornly resistant to change and serves as the default mode of human cognition.

5. *Hot cognition*: In public policy, all social and political concepts and objects can be understood as affect laden (Lodge and Taber 2005; Morris et al. 2003), or at least potentially so. If a concept or object is unfamiliar, individuals will perform a “search” in order to assign affect to the new concept or object in terms of their existing understanding of the world. When concepts or mental impressions of objects are cognitively activated or situated in the individual’s existing understanding of the world, so too are their System 1 affective attachments (see, for example, Redlawsk 2002, p. 1023).
6. *Confirmation and disconfirmation bias*: Individuals engage in confirmation bias where they treat congruent evidence that agrees with their priors (beliefs, knowledge, etc.) as stronger than incongruent evidence (Taber and Lodge 2006), and process congruent stimuli quicker than incongruent stimuli (Lodge and Taber 2005); likewise, individuals also engage in disconfirmation bias where evidence that is incongruent to an individual’s priors is counter-argued (Taber and Lodge 2006) and takes longer to process than evidence that is congruent (Lodge and Taber 2005).
7. *Selective exposure*: Individuals select sources and information that are congruent with what they already believe (Kunda 1990, p. 495; Taber and Lodge 2006). A practical example of this behavior is found in the fact that conservatives like to watch FOX News while liberals prefer to watch MSNBC (Stroud 2008).
8. *Identity-protective cognition*: Selective exposure, confirmation bias, and disconfirmation bias are conditioned by knowledge and prior beliefs and used by individuals in a way that protects their prior identity, or who they already understand themselves to be (e.g., Kahan et al. 2007). Those with the strongest prior attitudes employ what they know to protect their priors, especially those with higher levels of knowledge and political sophistication (Taber and Lodge 2006).
9. *Primacy of groups and networks*: Individuals do not process information in a vacuum; rather, the social, professional, familial, and cultural networks and groups in which they find themselves immersed play a vital role in helping individuals assign affect to social and political concepts and objects (e.g., Kahan and Braman 2006; Kurzban 2010). In short, people look to their trusted relationships and associations to help them make sense of the world.

10. *Narrative cognition*: Psychologist Donald E. Polkinghorne writes that narrative is the primary means by which human beings make sense of, and situate themselves within, the world and in doing so renders human existence meaningful (1988, p. 11). Exogenous (external) to the individual and in terms of our prior nine postulates, it is posited that narrative serves as the primary communication device within and across groups and networks; internal to the individual (endogenous), narrative also serves as a preferred means for organizing thoughts, memories, affect, and other cognitions (Berinsky and Kinder 2006; Jones and Song 2014). Thus, in academic terms, narrative is the preferred heuristic employed by all for the purposes of making sense of the world, as it provides essential linkages between Systems 1 and 2 cognition. In plain language, people tell and remember stories.

From this model of the individual, the NPF deduces that narrative communications and cognition are likely to play an important role in public policy.

At the micro level the NPF encourages the refinement and testing of the relationship between policy narratives and individuals. Table 1.2 lists existing micro-level hypotheses, their source of origin, offers a brief explanation of the theory behind each hypothesis, and lists studies that have tested each.

Considered in total, research testing the hypotheses in table 1.2 has been primarily concerned with how policy narratives impact individual-level preferences and opinion related to specific public policy areas (e.g., Jones 2010; 2013) with the dominant methodologies at this level of analysis being experimental and within-subjects designs. While Chapter 2 provides a detailed assessment of existing NPF studies, it is worthwhile to point out a few findings anticipating the analysis of the next chapter in this edited volume. The majority of the studies at the micro level have examined congruence and incongruence ( $H_3$ ). For example, Jones and Song (2013), in their study of climate change policy and mass opinion, found that respondents exposed to narratives were more likely to cognitively mirror the organization of the narrative presented to them if the narrative was culturally congruent with the respondent's cultural type. McBeth et al. (2010b) and Lybecker et al. (2013) found in their studies of recycling that a person's citizenship views were congruent with different stories of recycling. Using Lakoff's (2002) parenting metaphor, Clemons et al. (2012) found that an individual's parenting view was only partially congruent with their preference for obesity stories. Examining the influence of characters ( $H_5$ ) on the persuasiveness of climate change policy narratives, Jones (2010; 2013) found that the hero character was central to driving individual perceptions of risk and climate change policy preferences. Most recently and related to the narrative transportation hypothesis ( $H_2$ ), Jones (2014) found that the more a person is transported into narratives about climate change, the more positively that person responds to the hero of the story, which in turn leads to a higher willingness to accept arguments and solutions argued for in the policy narrative.

**Table 1.2** Micro-level NPF hypotheses and relevant studies

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Brief description of theory</i>	<i>Hypothesis wording</i>	<i>Applications</i>
H <sub>1</sub> : <i>Breach</i>	Status quo or canonical stories are not very memorable. “Stories that do violence to the norm, breach banality, and rend expectations” (Jones and McBeth, 2010) are the stories that persuade	As a narrative’s level of breach increases, an individual exposed to that narrative is more likely to be persuaded (Jones and McBeth 2010)	None
H <sub>2</sub> : <i>Narrative Transportation</i>	Green and Brock (2000) describe narrative transportation as the process by which a reader disengages in the world around them and becomes immersed in a story	As narrative transportation increases, an individual exposed to that narrative is more likely to be persuaded (Jones and McBeth 2010)	Jones (2014)
H <sub>3</sub> : <i>Congruence and Incongruence</i>	As specified in the NPF micro-level postulates, individuals are more receptive to policy narratives that they recognize as similar to their own understandings of the world	As perception of congruence increases, an individual is more likely to be persuaded by the narrative (Jones and McBeth, 2010)	Husmann (2013) Lybecker et al. (2013) McBeth et al. (2010a) Jones and Song (2014) Shanahan et al. (2011)
H <sub>4</sub> : <i>Narrator Trust</i>	Individuals are more receptive of policy stories that come from sources they trust	As narrator trust increases, an individual is more likely to be persuaded by the narrative (Jones and McBeth 2010)	None
H <sub>5</sub> : <i>The Power of Characters</i>	Characters are central to policy narratives. Emotional responses, sympathy for, aversion to, and/or other reactions to characters are likely to play an important role in the persuasiveness of a policy narrative	The portrayal of policy narrative characters (heroes, victims, and villains) has higher levels of influence on the opinions and preferences of citizens, elected officials, and elites than scientific or technical information (Shanahan et al. 2011b)	Jones (2010) Jones (2013)

Notably, the research done at the micro level is nascent, with only a handful of studies and two of the identified hypotheses remaining untested (H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>4</sub>). Despite the limited number of studies, unlike other prominent policy process frameworks and theories, the NPF is the only framework to our knowledge that actively engages and promotes research intended to refine its model of the individual as opposed to simply assuming it (see Sabatier 2007). Our reasons for

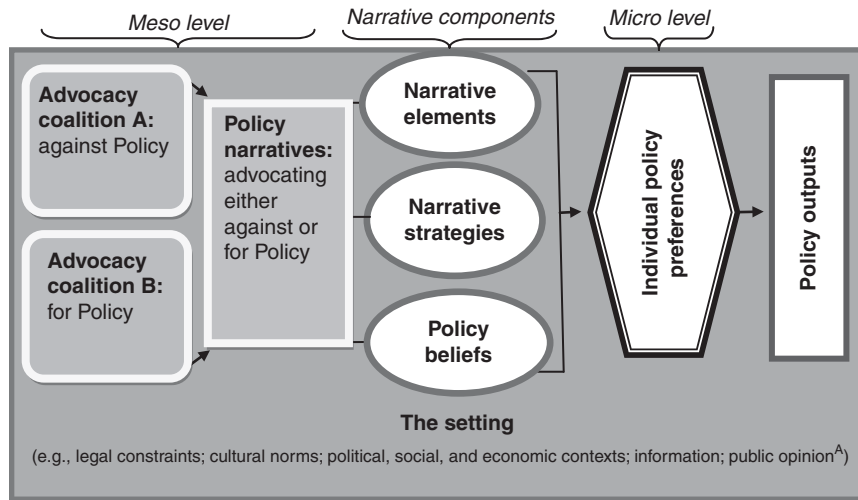
doing so are straightforward. If we are to understand how, when, and why policy narratives shape public policy processes, designs, and outcomes at the larger meso and macro scales, we need the most refined understanding of how narrative works at an individual level as is possible.

*Meso-Level NPF: Agora Narrans*

While the NPF's assumptions are aimed at the structure and function of policy narratives and the micro-level *homo narrans* postulates address the processing of policy narratives at the individual level, the meso level of the NPF—*agora narrans*—concerns itself with the role of policy narratives in a policy system. Thus, meso-level NPF begins from the premise that the objective of stakeholders in a policy system is to achieve a policy goal. Meso-level NPF also accepts the importance of variables identified by existing policy process theories (e.g., ACE, IAD) such as resources, issue salience, and coalition cooperation in their role in explaining policy designs, processes, change, and outcomes. Importantly, however, the NPF adds a new class of variables, that of policy narratives, which links actions taken in the policy system with narrative communication.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the NPF brings to the fore the idea that effective action at the meso level of policy systems requires communication. Those in ancient Greece deeply understood this linkage. The agora was the physical and public space where communicative action designed to achieve a desired policy goal could take place, principally through reasoned, impassioned narratives. Thus, *agora narrans* is NPF's meso-level examination of the strategic construction and communication of policy narratives to achieve a desired policy goal.

For the NPF, the concepts of policy subsystems (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993) and boundary-spanning policy regimes (May and Jochim 2013) are current-day operationalizations of the agora, wherein policy narratives are disseminated and embedded with narrative elements, beliefs, and strategies intended to win in policy arenas. Whether bound by a policy domain or spanning across them, these policy narratives are constructed and circulated (in written, oral, and visual forms) by a variety of actors (interest groups, scientists, elected officials, agency personnel, media, businesses, high profile citizens, etc.). The constellations of actors form advocacy coalitions that seek to realize their preferred policy outcome (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Sabatier and Weible 2007). For *agora narrans*, the unit of analysis is the policy system (policy subsystem or policy regime), with analyses aimed at policy narratives generated by competing coalitions.

How do policy narratives function at the meso-level? By way of illustration, Figure 1.1 offers an answer to this question by depicting the meso-level NPF. Policy narratives in the *agora narrans* are constructed by individual actors, media or groups (McBeth and Shanahan 2004) that, together, constitute advocacy coalitions.<sup>7</sup> In constructing their policy narratives, coalitions designate narrative elements (e.g., characters, elements of the setting, plot, etc.) that elucidate their policy reality. These policy narratives and their constituent elements are oftentimes rooted in policy beliefs, reflecting deep core principles; however, at other



**Figure 1.1** Model of the meso-level narrative policy framework<sup>B</sup>

<sup>A</sup> Please note that public opinion is considered both exogenous and endogenous to the subsystem. See Shanahan et al. 2011a, pp. 550–551 for a detailed discussion of public opinion and the NPF.

<sup>B</sup> Please note that this figure is represented in *Theories of the Policy Process* McBeth, Jones and Shanahan, 2014.

times, a coalition's policy narratives may be more strategic as the coalition opts for more instrumental goals (such as specific policy provisions) not rooted in their beliefs. In either case, a coalition's policy narratives are aimed at a policy goal or solution and are strategically constructed for the purpose of influencing individual policy preferences, whether that influence is directed at decision makers, a specific constituency, or the public more generally.

Table 1.3 lists existing meso-level hypotheses, the general category within the NPF each hypothesis falls into, their origin source, and offers a brief explanation of the theory behind each hypothesis. Research testing these hypotheses has been primarily concerned with who composes policy narratives ( $H_9$ ), how these policy narratives are constructed ( $H_1$ ;  $H_2$ ;  $H_4$ ;  $H_7$ ;  $H_8$ ), how congruence across a coalition's policy narratives is related to policy success ( $H_5$ ), and how policy narratives affect the policy system ( $H_3$ ;  $H_6$ ).

While the next chapter in the volume goes into greater depth about NPF research findings and trends, to provide the reader with a sense of the kind of work done at the meso level, we feel it is worth highlighting a few representative studies. The dominant methodology at the meso level has been content analysis, which has allowed NPF researchers to better contextualize the use of narrative elements and strategies in policy narratives. Early NPF meso-level research found that the media is an important contributor in policy debates (Shanahan et al. 2008). In addition to expanding our understanding of coalition membership, coding for narrative elements has been a hallmark of meso-level research (e.g., McBeth et al. 2005; Shanahan et al. 2013). NPF scholars have identified narrative elements (especially characters) to operationalize policy beliefs to



**Table 1.3** NPF Meso-level hypotheses

<i>Category</i>	<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Brief description of theory</i>	<i>Hypothesis wording</i>
Narrative Strategy	H <sub>1</sub> and H <sub>2</sub> : <i>Scope of Conflict</i>	According to E. E. Schattschneider (1960), political actors will expand or contract the scope of conflict to control other actor involvement in a policy subsystem to favor their position	Groups or individuals who are portraying themselves as losing on a policy issue will use narrative elements to expand the policy issue to increase the size of their coalition  Groups or individuals who are portraying themselves as winning on a policy issue will use narrative elements to contain the policy issue to maintain the coalitional status quo. (McBeth et al., 2007)
Narrative Strategy	H <sub>3</sub> : <i>Heresthetics</i>	According to Riker (1983), political actors will use communication strategies to structure coalitions in such a way that they win	Groups will heresthetically employ policy narratives to manipulate the composition of political coalitions for their strategic benefit (Jones and McBeth, 2010)
Narrative Strategy	H <sub>4</sub> : <i>The Devil Shift</i>	Political actors will “exaggerate the malicious motives, behaviors, and influence of opponents” (Sabatier et al., 1987)	Higher incidence of the devil shift in policy subsystems is associated with policy intractability (Shanahan et al., 2011a; Shanahan et al. 2013)
Policy Beliefs	H <sub>5</sub> : <i>Coalition Glue</i>	The quality of the bonds that tie advocacy coalitions together matters. Coalitions with stronger bonds are less likely to be “distracted by internal disagreements”, more able to coordinate activities and secure resources (Shanahan et al., 2011a, p. 548)	Advocacy coalitions with policy narratives that contain higher levels of coalitional glue (coalition stability, strength, and intra-coalition cohesion) will more likely influence policy outcomes (Shanahan et al. 2011a; Shanahan et al. 2013)
Policy Learning	H <sub>6</sub> : <i>Policy Narrative Persuasion</i>	Reconfiguring policy narrative elements can alter the policy landscape independent of new information or focusing events (Shanahan et al., 2011a)	Variation in policy narrative elements helps explain policy learning, policy change, and policy outcomes (Shanahan et al. 2011a)
Public Opinion	H <sub>7</sub> : <i>Exogenous Public Opinion</i>	Public opinion works potentially as both a resource and constraint on policy subsystem actors. When public opinion is in favor of a group they will attempt to use that opinion to their advantage (Jones and Jenkins-Smith, 2009)	When exogenous public opinion is congruent with a coalition’s preferred policy outcomes, coalitions will offer policy narratives that seek to contain the subsystem coalition (by maintaining the status quo membership of the coalition) (Shanahan et al. 2011a)

**Table 1.3** (Continued)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Brief description of theory</i>	<i>Hypothesis wording</i>
Public Opinion	H <sub>8</sub> : <i>Endogenous Public Opinion</i>		When endogenous public opinion shocks are incongruent with a coalition's preferred policy outcome, coalitions will offer policy narratives that seek to expand the subsystem coalition (Shanahan et al. 2011a)
Coalition Membership	H <sub>9</sub> : <i>Media</i>	Media are important players in policy subsystems that have been neglected in the study of public policy (Shanahan et al., 2008)	The media can be a contributor to advocacy coalitions (Shanahan et al. 2008)

understand levels of conflict within policy systems (e.g., McBeth et al. 2005). More recent work has turned to an examination of the strength of these policy beliefs within and across coalitions (Shanahan et al. 2011a; Shanahan et al. 2013). The idea of narrative strategies, developed by McBeth et al. (2007), has guided meso-level research to examine the scope of conflict through the strategic distribution of costs and concentrated benefits (e.g., Shanahan et al. 2013). Recent explorations of the narrative strategy of the devil–angel shift (Sabatier et al. 1987) have also been examined (Shanahan et al. 2013), with initial findings revealing that the devil shift is associated with a losing narrative strategy and the angel shift with a winning one.

Some of the hypotheses listed in table 1.3 have been previously tested, and others remain open for future research. While substantial opinion research can be found at the NPF's micro level, at the meso level, group and coalitional usage of policy narratives and their relationship with both exogenous and endogenous public opinion (H<sub>6</sub> and H<sub>7</sub>) remains an area in need of further research. Additionally, the relationship between narratives and policy learning (H<sub>7</sub>), and how Riker's heresthetics (1986) can be used to understand how narratives are manipulated for strategic coalition formation (H<sub>2</sub>), are also in need of empirical examination.

Much of the NPF meso-level work has contributed to the advancement of our understanding of the function of policy narratives in a policy system. Despite the ten years of work at this level, there are three lines of work that are needed. First, these hypotheses need to be tested and re-tested to strengthen the reliability and validity of current findings. Second, more efficient methods such as computer coding are needed to enable the coding of larger bodies of narratives. Third, the larger question still looms untested: to what extent do policy narratives influence policy outputs?

*Macro-Level NPF*

At the macro level, Jones and McBeth (2010) argue that the NPF could foreseeably examine cultural and institutional policy narratives that condition and permeate social bodies over long periods of time to determine how such narratives shape public policy (and the groups and individuals within the social body). Such studies are likely to look at substantial periods of time examining cultural and institutional policy narratives that likely span multiple policy subsystems. The authors posited that macro-level NPF studies would need to rely on archival or historical analyses, but think such explorations are within the NPF's reach given the burgeoning amount of American Political Development studies (e.g., Jensen 2003; Szymanski 2003) in political science and public policy over the past 15 years, which champion such methods in the social sciences. To date, no macro-level NPF study has been conducted. However, we are optimistic that these studies are forthcoming.

### The Structure of This Book

Section I of the book presents an introduction to the NPF (Chapter 1), followed by a detailed meta-review of NPF applications in Chapter 2 entitled “Research Design and the Narrative Policy Framework” by Jonathan Pierce (University of Colorado-Denver), Aaron Smith-Walter (Virginia Tech), and Holly Peterson (Oregon State University). Section II of the volume presents *Micro-level NPF: Individuals and Policy Narratives*. Chapter 3, “The Narrative Policy Framework and the Practitioner: Communicating Recycling Policy,” by Mark K. McBeth, Donna L. Lybecker, and Maria Husmann (Idaho State University), demonstrates how the NPF can be used by public policy practitioners in community environmental policy messages communicated to citizens. Chapter 4 by Elizabeth A. Shanahan (Montana State University), Stephanie M. Adams (Montana State University), Michael D. Jones (Oregon State University), and Mark K. McBeth (Idaho State University) presents “The Blame Game: Narrative Persuasiveness of the Causal Mechanism.” Using narratives derived from a wildlife management policy debate, this chapter explores the influence of the causal mechanism on individual opinion.

Section III presents *Meso-level NPF: Groups, Coalitions, and Policy Narratives*. Chapter 5 provides one of the first NPF attempts to systematically study an issue outside the United States (India). Kuhika Gupta, Joseph T. Ripberger (University of Oklahoma), and Savannah Collins (Texas A&M University) explore the political strategies of issue expansion and containment around the siting of a power plant in India. Tom O’Byrne, Claire Dunlop, and Claudio Radaelli (University of Exeter) present Chapter 6, “Narrating the ‘Arab Spring’: Where Expertise Meets Heuristics in Legislative Hearings.” The authors compare how the United States and the United Kingdom responded to the Arab Spring through an analysis of the policy narratives that emerged in the respective country’s legislative bodies. Chapter 7 finds Desera Crow and John Beggren (University of Colorado, Boulder) offering a multi-case study entitled “Using

the Narrative Policy Framework to Understand Stakeholder Strategy and Effectiveness: A Multi-Case Analysis” in which they examine narrative elements and strategies across four environmental policy issues in Colorado. Chapter 8, “Coalitions are People: Policy Narratives and the Defeat of Ohio Senate Bill 5,” by Andrew Kear (Bowling Green State University) and Dominic D. Wells (Kent State University) explores regional media and elite policy narratives using NPF elements. In their study, regional media policy narratives are compared to voter registration and turnout, voting results by county, and public opinion data to help explain why Ohio voters overwhelmingly reject SB5 in a referendum campaign. Tanya Heikkila, Christopher Weible, and Jonathan Pierce (University of Colorado-Denver) deliver Chapter 9, “Exploring the Policy Narratives and Politics of Hydraulic Fracturing in New York.” These scholars examine the construction of policy narratives disseminated by opposing coalitions in a debate that saw winners and losers. Finally, Steven Ney (Jacobs University), like Gupta et al. and O’Byrne et al., provides an analysis of a non-US policy issue in Chapter 10, “The Governance of Social Innovation: Connecting Meso and Macro Levels of Analysis.” Ney studies German policy actors and uses the NPF to explore how German policy makers construct stories about social entrepreneurship and how the NPF might predict the policy conflicts that emerge from policy learning by examining both macro and meso levels of analysis.

Section IV, *The NPF and Policy Process Theory*, opens with Chapter 11, “Assessing the NPF,” where Chris Weible (University of Colorado, Denver) and Edella Schlager (University of Arizona) provide an analysis of the chapters in this edited volume with special attention to how the chapters contribute to the existing body of public policy process theory. Finally, Chapter 12 presents a conclusion and is written by Shanahan, McBeth, and Jones. This chapter identifies how the findings in this edited volume have advanced the NPF as a policy process theory as well as frames some questions and future directions for NPF research.

Smith and Larimer describe the NPF as a hybrid platform of post-positivist theory and rationalist methods (2013, pp. 233–234). They go on to note that the success or failure of the NPF is too early to judge. Will the NPF “be embraced as a child of both camps or a monster of neither?” (Smith and Larimer 2013, p. 234). We believe the contents of this edited volume support the former.

## Notes

1. Descriptions of the NPF (assumptions, conceptual definitions, three levels of analysis, hypotheses) also appear in McBeth, Jones, and Shanahan (2014), Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, and Lane (2013), Shanahan, Jones and McBeth (2011a), and Jones and McBeth (2010). In the interest of consistency and clarity, the content across these publications has been kept as similar as possible and in some cases where precision is essential the text and formatting is exactly the same.

2. The NPF has at times been characterized as a subcategory of frames (Jones and Song, 2014; Jones, 2013).
3. See, for example, Lejano, Ingram and Ingram (2013), Chapter 7. The authors operationalize several narrative elements in their study of the power of narrative in environmental networks that are not included in the NPF's narrative elements depicted here.
4. Some appropriate belief system theories include Cultural Theory (Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 1990), cultural cognition (e.g., Kahan and Braman, 2006), materialism and postmaterialism (e.g., Inglehart, 1997), and moral psychology (e.g., Haidt, 2007). It is worth mentioning that while ideology is a popular deductive belief system given its political relevance, ideology measures tend to be less useful when respondent sophistication is low, while Cultural Theory has been found to be consistent at both high and low levels of sophistication (see Ripberger et al. 2012).
5. These 10 postulates also appear verbatim in McBeth, Jones, and Shanahan (2014).
6. These ideas are not necessarily new; for example, Norbert Weiner (1948), one of the originators of cybernetics, notably linked "control," i.e., actions taken to realize goals, with "communication," i.e., information flow between actors and the environment.
7. Identifying coalitions has been achieved through narrative accounts about policy goals (Shanahan et al. 2013) and survey and network analysis of policy beliefs (Zafonte and Sabatier 1998; Ingold 2011). However, who belongs to advocacy coalitions and how to measure this membership are questions receiving increasingly sophisticated responses (see Leifeld and Haunss 2012).

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