Linking social networks to opinion formation: how social networks influence social opposition to large infrastructure development in Southern California

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Abstract

Abstract for the session: Networks and Cooperation: are social network characteristics generalizable or specific to the environment in which they are embedded. Energy infrastructures and, more generally, public infrastructures are necessary for our future prosperity (i.e. access to water, energy, transportation). However, new infrastructure development is often politically contested, resulting in litigation and social conflict that can pit communities against each other, and against regulators and infrastructure providers.

In this paper we propose to identify the relationships existing between successful opposition to energy infrastructure projects and the social networks of community based organizations in Southern California. California is rightfully considered at the forefront of energy and environmental policies. We use social network analysis in order to explain community based organization activities and their linkages to the broader institutional domain. Empirical evidence suggests that network size affects political activity, and that network structure influences political conflict and availability of expertise. However, more research is needed in order to understand if a clear relationship between networks and outcomes exist. Our work addresses the need to better understand grassroots movements rather than national organizations. Our research also extends existing research on the relationship between collective action and the characteristics of social networks. The research is important uncover the role of social networks in explaining historical activity and to predict future possible socio-political conflict in relation to public infrastructure development.

Keywords: networks, cooperation, social movements, social networks, social media, infrastructure, energy

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