NGOs and Climate Advocacy

Jennifer Hadden (2015)
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The fracturing of the climate network: A review of Jennifer Hadden's *Networks in Contention*

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Jennifer Hadden's *Networks in Contention* is an excellent addition to the growing body of work on transnational advocacy movements. Hadden's book offers a methodologically sophisticated account of how the climate advocacy movement fractured in the lead up to the 2009 Copenhagen negotiations, including network analysis, statistical techniques, content analysis, elite interviews and participant observation. While surely there are gems that were left on the cutting room floor, Hadden's book is pithy and spare, which serves the book well as it is highly readable.

A Relational Theory of Network Tactical Diffusion

The thesis is that networks of relationships in coalitions help shape what tactics organizations pursue through several processes. Networks serve to convey information, pool resources and socialize participants to what strategies will best serve the network. Hadden shows that in the lead up to the Copenhagen negotiations the climate network cleaved into two dominant coalitions (with constellations of two minor ones orbiting each of the others). One was the conventional Climate Action Network (CAN) of mainline environmental organizations that has been in existence since the 1980s. The other was the Climate Justice Now! (CJN) coalition whose members reflected more of the concerns of the development and wider global justice organizations, many of whom were of more recent vintage from the 1990s.

Hadden documents that before Copenhagen there was a large influx of new actors and organizations interested in participating in the UNFCCC climate negotiations. The two main coalitions pulled further apart as differences emerged over framing and tactics. CAN had long emphasized scientific language of a planetary emergency and sought to exercise influence through insider strategies of technical competence and lobbying. CJN, which started out informally in 2007, became more of a full-fledged rival network with there being little overlap in membership

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between the two coalitions. As Copenhagen loomed, CJN began to embrace and attract organizations and individuals more interested in the implications of inaction on climate for poor people and poor countries, indigenous groups and women. CJN came to embrace more contentious politics of protest action, building on the experience of global justice groups that had earlier sought to shut down global meetings such as the 1999 WTO negotiations in Seattle.

A handful of organizations like Friends of the Earth had a relationship with both but were not interested or able to play the role of a broker. As a consequence, during Copenhagen, with tens of thousands of protesters descending on the negotiations, there were rival actions from the two networks, with the direct action of the climate justice movement triggering a backlash from event organizers who ultimately severely circumscribed civil society participation for the final days of the negotiations.

Hadden carefully documents these developments, peppering the more technical methods discussion with quotes from her ample stock of interviews and deep knowledge of how these groups worked from hundreds of hours of observation.

The theoretical contributions about how networks convey information, pool resources and socialize members to converge on common tactics ring true to me. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, I was a college environment and development campaigner in North Carolina and later in England with ties to larger national campaigning organizations. In England, our environmental group started as a pretty conventional lobby group seeking recycling on campus, but our development advocacy branched out to embrace more contentious politics including civil disobedience, including street protest and direct action. We held retreats and conferences to teach members about the substance of issues as well as tactical and strategic techniques to be better activists. The willingness of some activists to participate in guerrilla theater or protests, including infiltrating bank shareholder meetings, communicated to others that such actions were appropriate and desirable.

Hadden succeeds here in putting that experiential knowledge that activists are likely aware of in terms that are theoretically meaningful to a political science audience. The discussion of resource pooling immediately reminded me of Ken Abbott's discussion of why states might want to delegate authority to inter-governmental organizations as more can be done together than alone.

The book is very careful in seeking to document its claims, in showing the presence of the two networks, their distinct organizational structures, the limited connections between them and differences in the patterns of what kinds of frames and tactics they employed. Hadden goes further in Chapter 3 with statistical analysis to show that groups that had more associations in 2008 with groups that had employed contentious action were more likely to employ them themselves in 2009. Moreover, she seeks to test alternative pathways that might have yielded similar results such as indirect exposure to media accounts of protests. Through these techniques, she is largely able to rule out other processes and corroborate her story that groups came to embrace contentious political strategies mainly based on their relations with other groups.

Unpacking Contention

While there is a vast literature on contention itself, I wanted the book to linger a bit more on the concept in the main text. A methodological appendix details what counts as contention, which minimally includes demonstrations and protests and extends to such things as property damage and violence. However, as the book details in Chapter 4 on the conventional advocacy organizations in CAN, many of them were comfortable with the occasional demonstration. Indeed, Greenpeace, which got its start as a more radical action-oriented advocacy organization, is counted as one of the upstanding members of the more conventional, lobby and information-based advocacy coalition.

From this perspective, there are gradations of contention. Indeed, the book indicates that CJN members were more inclined to engage in 'transgressive' contention. I was not sure if this was an actual analytical category, but it could be to the extent that the UNFCCC would likely not object to an permitted demonstration that had a set route and announced start and stop times with an acceptable repertoire of banners, slogans, songs and even puppets. So long as the protesters kept to the script and left no property damaged, this ritual of protest, of semi-contention, could pay homage to the more radical beginnings of groups like Greenpeace, communicate to policymakers that a vocal public wanted them to do more, and yet stop short of descending into violence or the unexpected. Such a demonstration, like the family friendly one organized by CAN's coalition partner the Global Campaign for Climate Action, would presumably be counted as contention. I wonder if the project could benefit from coding gradation of contention, distinguishing between semi-contention and transgressive contention. I am not sure if the findings would change all that much, though the 2008 baseline might be different in terms of the two coalitions and their incoming priors of what kinds of tactics they were comfortable with.

The Implications for Transnational Advocacy

Hadden's book has implications for how to think about movement influence. One of the key insights is that larger movements are not necessarily better. As expected, the collective action costs of coordination increase with more actors with diverse preferences. A larger movement ultimately was less able to exercise influence over the climate negotiations in 2009, as it fractured into two competing

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blocs. Hadden helpfully notes that movement division may not always undermine influence and that further research would help elucidate the conditions under which division undercuts movement influence.

Here, I was struck by the fact that Hadden only mentioned the so-called 'radical flank effect' once late in the concluding pages of the book. The radical flank effect is a contested idea in sociology that a radical faction to a movement can help make the moderates look more compelling and credible, though some suggest that overly radical tactics can sometimes trigger a backlash by the authorities. It would have been useful to linger and expound on the theoretical relationship between the contentious groups and the conventional lobby organizations, and the ultimate significance for the climate movement's influence on the 2009 Copenhagen negotiations. There was ample discussion of the way the more contentious politics of the CGN network triggered more repressive tactics at Copenhagen that extended to subsequent meetings, but I would have liked a more fulsome discussion of how that observation relates to the radical flank effect.

Lessons for Advocacy and Climate Governance

Hadden is rightly muted in her catalog of the movement's accomplishments at Copenhagen, not least because the fractured movement was less able to speak with one voice to exercise influence over the process. Hadden notes that the climate justice network was able to convince a handful of countries like Bolivia and Venezuela to embrace their language, and that climate justice was then appropriated even by moderate campaigners in subsequent negotiations. That is pretty slim pickings.

Still, I am struck by the observation that both the conventional climate advocates and the justice campaigners went in to Copenhagen still hoping to double down on what Joanna Depledge had described as an ossified climate architecture. While Hadden details how moderate campaigners strived for relevance by identifying policy options on the near margins of political acceptability, there does not seem to be much anticipation or strategic foresight on their part in to what Copenhagen ultimately wrought in climate governance. Apparently, most campaigners were hopeful that Copenhagen would yield a new climate treaty or at least thought that it should. Months before hand, it was pretty clear that the financial crisis and a new US administration just finding its footing would make that a pipedream.

Copenhagen signaled a decisive departure in climate governance away from the Kyoto Protocol style negotiations of top-down legally binding targets and timetables taken home by states for subsequent ratification. Copenhagen ushered in a new era of pledge and review, of states identifying what actions and targets they thought they were capable of, what have come to be called Intended Nationally Determined Contributions. As I wrote in a 2010 paper for the Council on Foreign Relations, that shift in the architecture was a huge positive breakthrough, as it enabled the United States to participate in the regime, in a way that the Kyoto treaty-based process could not (since the bar for treaty ratification in the United States typically requires a near impossible 2/3 of US Senators to offer their advice and consent). The new approach in turn made it possible for China, now the world's largest emitter by far of greenhouse gases, to move beyond the unhelpful notion of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' and accept some form of commitments.

Would a united movement at Copenhagen made such a change in course politically impossible? Would that have been a good thing? I think the answers to those questions are both no. Here, I think Hadden could benefit from further reflections in subsequent work on governments and their side of the equation. Under what conditions can movements influence governments? Most of the book is focused on the self-organization of the movements, but less space is devoted toward a theory of change and why negotiators would listen to climate campaigners. How do national and transnational politics intersect with movement influence? Are national governments at all responsive to foreign campaigners? If so, do the avenues of influence go beyond those identified by Keck and Sikkink in their classic work?

As I have written about elsewhere, transnational campaigners can mobilize a temporary spotlight and put pressure on politicians for action. Governments will be most responsive when their leaders are ideologically inclined to support those concerns anyway and if the domestic supporters of the movement are politically relevant at home (for climate campaigners, there are few places outside of Europe where that is really true). However, if policymakers are ideologically opposed to those concerns and if the requests are very costly, social movements may have limited points of leverage to move powerful states to change their behavior.

These concerns about developing a theory of movement influence in general and the climate regime in particular should be taken as friendly amendments, as I found Hadden's book to be highly persuasive, robustly researched and accessible.

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